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# STARMONT

Facsimile Fiction #13

## Red Twilight

by Harl Vincent

## World's End

by  
Victor  
Rousseau

Two Novels from Argosy

Starmont Facsimile Fiction #13

# Red Twilight

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# World's End

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Two Classic Novels  
from

ARGOSY



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Starmont Facsimile Fiction #13

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*Harl Vincent*

(September 12, 1931) An outlawed scientist and his adventurous friend Ford Matthews alone dared to face the truth, when blood-colored vapors hid the sun and warned of disaster to Earth.

WORLD'S END 62

*Victor Rousseau*

(July 8, 1933) Nils Ericson was due to die for a murder he had not committed— if the comet let the world last that long.

## Introduction

One of the most popular themes used in early science fiction was that of a world-wide disaster—either natural, man-made or alien in nature. Along with interplanetary tales, such stories were the main features of the pulps that featured science fiction long before the beginning of all science fiction magazines. And, even with the advent of such magazines, the disaster story remained a staple item.

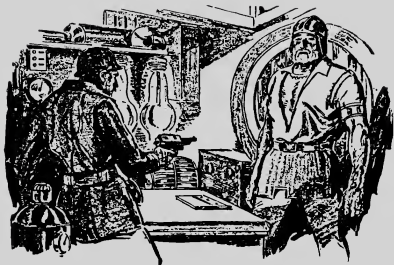
In the Munsey magazines, such stories of planetary disaster were always among the most popular fiction published in the magazines. George Allen England had the Earth ravaged by strange monsters from outer space in "The Empire of the Air." Erle Stanley Gardner had the world threatened by floods in "New Worlds." Human criminals were the menace that threatened the peace of the planet in Murray Leinster's "The Man Who Put Out the Sun." In "Drink We Deep," by Arthur Leo Zagat, invaders from beneath a lake threaten the entire human race. Novel after novel had mankind about to perish or the very planet on the brink of annihilation.

Two distinct types of disaster novels were published. One was the fast-paced action story, with the emphasis on what was happening and how people were working to stop it. The second type novel placed main emphasis on how people reacted to the disaster and dwelt more on the human aspect of the problem. In this book we reprint two novels, each representing one of these two types.

“Red Twilight” by Harl Vincent is the fast-action type novel of interplanetary disaster. A strange red vapor hides the sun and at the same time begins to suck the Earth dry of water. The hero and his scientist friend travel to Mars to battle this menace. Harl Vincent (1894-1968) was the pen-name of Harl Vincent Schoepflin, an engineer who wrote science fiction for both the adventure pulps and the science fiction magazines. He had over 70 published stories and was quite popular in the late twenties and early thirties. “Red Twilight” was his only serial and it is one of his best stories. Needless to say, it has never been reprinted since its initial appearance in 1931.

Our second complete novel is “World’s End” by Victor Rousseau. In this novel, a menace much like that in “Off on a Comet” brings about severe changes on the Earth. Instead of the focus on what is being done about the disaster, the novel concentrates on what happens to the people involved with it. There are no alien menaces in this story. People are the only living creatures to cause trouble. It is a powerful story of love and hate. The author, Victor Rousseau Emanuel, was a very popular writer for the Munsey magazines. He also had several stories in the early science fiction magazines. His novel, “The Beetle Horde,” was the cover story for the first issue of *Astounding Stories*.

Because of the length of our two feature novels, there are no short stories in this issue.



# Red Twilight



*Excited cries rose at the little Martian chief's barked words*

## Red Twilight

*An outlawed scientist and his adventurous friend Ford Matthews alone dared to face the truth, when blood-colored vapors hid the sun and warned of disaster to Earth*

**By HARL VINCENT**

*Author of "Beyond the Dark Nebula," etc.*

### CHAPTER I.

#### OMEN OF DISASTER

**W**HEN he first noticed the change in the light, Ford Matthews blinked and made a notation on his calendar pad. Eye

trouble. It was time he visited an oculist. He dismissed the matter and returned to the financial statement on his desk.

Just past thirty and looking younger, with his straight youthful body and Nordic blondness, Ford managed the



big export business he had inherited from his father, and did a good job of it. Already he was known to Wall Street as a clever youngster who was bound to make his mark.

But this everlasting grind, this battle of wits and of dollars, was irksome. Ford had looked forward to other things when in college. An outdoor life; adventure and travel. Most of all, a fantastic but hopeful search for his long lost brother, Paul. But the sudden passing of their father had brought a change in his plans. Ford was now chained to his desk in an office whose luxurious furnishings oppressed him; where the metallic chatter of the ticker was ever in his ears. He drove himself to his tasks here within steel and granite walls that towered at the lower end of Manhattan Island. Of all places, this sparkling June Day!

He grew restless now, without knowing why. The figures danced before him in a glow like that of fire-light. Ford looked up and brought his gaze to bear absent-mindedly on the spot where, but a few moments earlier, a shaft of sunlight had made dazzling golden-brown highlights and mellow shadows of the oaken panels and molding.

A mysterious alteration had come in the appearance of the rich carving; the tiny gargoyles grinned down at him maliciously, their wicked features wreathed in flame-lit haze. The shadows were deep and menacing with red mists. It seemed as if a vast conflagration flared in the heavens.

Somewhere in the outer offices a feminine scream rose hysterically and ended in a choked gasp. The door burst open and Ford's secretary entered, swaying uncertainly, with cheeks ashen and eyes staring wildly.

"Look!" she quavered, pointing.

"The sun, Mr. Matthews! The sky! It's the end of the world!"

And then Miss Knowles, coolly efficient and unexcitable business woman that she was, fell forward with a shuddering moan. Catching her in his arms as she toppled, Ford stretched her limp form on a divan. The overwrought girl had fainted.

Something very much out of the ordinary had happened. Ford could hear the clamor of his employees deserting their desks in the outer offices and crowding to the exits. He rushed to the window.

The sun, an enormous ball of fire, hung there motionless, its rim aflame and dripping blood-red in a crimson haze. In the lurid half-light the waters of the harbor rippled and smoldered like the surface of a vast lava caldron. A veritable gehenna had come out of the skies to visit the proud and prosperous New York of 1962.

**E**IGHTY stories below, Battery Park was a restless sea of humanity. Milling, gesticulating crowds already packed the area and every face was turned skyward. The frantic screams of women and the hoarse shouts of men mingled in a terrified roar that swelled to drown out the noises of the city.

A police siren shrieked somewhere in the cañon of Broadway, and the clanging of gongs added to the din as reserves were rushed to the congested areas. The roar of a high-powered airship rose to a thunder and then trailed off into a smooth purr as a five-motored monoplane of the Meteorological Service swept past and drove off into the red mist, its bright wings appearing to drip live flame before they were swallowed up in the eerie haze.

Suddenly it was choking hot; im-

## RED TWILIGHT

bearable. The breath of a furnace drifted in through the open window, and it reeked of alien gases and of decay—of dead things.

Stifling, Ford stumbled to his desk and tore at the call lever of his visiphone. An interminable delay ensued before the frightened face of the operator flashed on the viewing disk. Mechanically, the girl repeated his number, and he saw that her eyes were vacant and staring. These girls stuck to their jobs through thick and thin. The crack of doom itself would not drive them from their posts.

The disk glowed anew, and Owen Wardell, most eccentric of Earth's scientists, looked out at him scowling. His lean jaw was set in grim lines, and the mop of iron-gray hair was tousled.

"Oh, it's you!" Wardell said. "Come out here right away, will you?" He was turning from the disk.

"But, Owen, wait! This crimson fog—what is it? The city is upset."

"I know," the scientist flung back. "It'll be worse later. I reported it to Washington, but those fools down there wouldn't listen, as usual." His scowl deepened and he shrugged his shoulders expressively. "Come right out, will you? I think this is the chance you've been waiting twenty years for."

The thin lips relaxed in a quick half-smile and the scientist reached for the lever of his visiphone. Ford's disk went blank. He could not summon his scientist friend to the screen again.

Galvanized into sudden activity, he dashed through the empty outer office and made his way to the street floor by way of the sole automatic elevator. The others had been forsaken by their operators. Dashing through the deserted corridor, he flung himself into the tangle of panic-stricken humans who struggled and fought and

screamed outside the main entrance of the building.

Sweating red-lit faces were thrust into his own, then lost in the mob. Groans and wild shrieks smote his ears; curses and prayers. A woman fainted not three feet from where he was wedged in the midst of the jam, and he saw her head roll limp on her shoulders before she slid down underfoot. Some man reached to help her, was smashed aside by the mob.

Over at the subway kiosk on Bowling Green the press was thickest. A burly policeman climbed over ducking heads and heaving shoulders, scrambling to the top of the structure. He was shouting through cupped hands. Somehow his voice carried through the din.

"The subways are blocked!" he yelled. "Take side streets to the rivers. Spread out!"

Some one shrieked piercingly, an awful gurgling cry of horror.

A street urchin wriggled through from somewhere and looked up grinning in Ford's face.

"Rotten mess, ain't it, mister?" he shrilled. Then he was whisked away and flung violently against a stone wall that loomed suddenly close. There was a sickening crunch as the little bullet-shaped head struck a projecting ledge. And the scrawny body slumped down between those jostling elbows and scrambling, kicking feet that were everywhere around him.

The red twilight and the bloody haze that dimmed yet revealed the more clearly, made a nightmare of it all.

FORD managed to worm his way toward the corner, pressing close to the rough building wall. Knuckles skinned. It was in a bedlam of noise and of brutal struggling with

the frenzied horde. But he must reach Bridge Street. It was his only hope of getting out of the city for many hours - if ever he got out alive. For on the flat roof of Number Ten was safely housed his autogiro plane.

A surging wave of howling humanity swept him out across the curb and into the street. A moment later he stumbled over the sidewalk on the opposite side and into Battery Park, clinging desperately to the broad shoulders of a bull-necked individual who seemed to be leading the concerted movement. And then he was lifted from his feet and carried along helpless and exhausted. It seemed that his ribs must give way under the pressure of the stampeding multitude.

The crowding eased somewhat and he regained his footing just as a great voice boomed out overhead. The huge sound amplifiers atop the Custom House were in action. This meant that an official broadcast was to be made, and the struggles and outcries of the mob stilled noticeably. It was easier breathing now.

In the red twilight the monstrous voice from the air seemed a ghastly and supernatural thing, yet it brought a semblance of order on the streets. A bulletin from the Naval Observatory, it was, that came to them in reassuring words. There was no danger to the populace in this red fog, the report ran. It was merely the passing of the entire solar system through an enormous cosmic cloud of red dust particles that partly obscured the sun and brought the mysterious crimson haze.

A great roar of relief swept up from the streets and momentarily drowned out the booming voice of the amplifiers. Hats were flung into the air and perfect strangers embraced one another gleefully.

This cosmic dust, the bulletin went on, was so fine that it would have no effect on living beings. The world was absolutely safe, and the people might go about their tasks as if nothing had happened. Astronomers would be able to report within a few hours on how long the red cloud would last. It would not be long.

The effect was magical. Laughing and crying by turn, the people who had been so thoroughly terrified, now broke up into chattering groups, who gazed into the red sky and pointed steady fingers at the crimson disk of the sun. In the weird half-light that no longer held anything of terror in its ruddy glow, the park quickly took on the appearance of a holiday.

Knowing Owen Wardell as he did, Ford was unconvinced and more than ever curious as to what the ominous red fog really was. He lost no time in getting to his autogiro.

As he waited for the elevator to the roof, he thought again of what Owen had said. "This is the chance you've been waiting twenty years for." Was it possible that their great adventure, the thing they had planned and hoped for, had come at last?

## CHAPTER II

### DARK CERTAINTY

**D**URING the swift trip over the Hudson and across north Jersey toward the mountains, Ford's thoughts slipped back twenty years to the past, that horrible night when Paul Matthews had gone out of the world.

As a lad of eleven, Ford had worshipped his older brother Paul, at nine teen, was a laughing, care-free giant for whom life was a great playground.

## RED TWILIGHT

How well he remembered that great rocket ship, and the envious thrill that had stirred him when Paul had been given a job in one of the workshops on the huge field where it had been erected! A gleaming cylinder of steel, it stood on four massive columns and poked its blunt nose into the clouds, the wonder of the countryside and of the world at large, the cause of much heated argument in the press and in engineering circles.

In 1942, when everything had been ready for the journey to Mars, Congress had refused permission for the journey. The builders had taken the matter into the courts, and there it had stagnated.

Paul had been inconsolable at first, but gradually his old smile came back. He crept into Ford's room one night and awakened him with excited whispers. The ship would take off that very night, law or no law. And he, Paul Matthews, was to go along.

In a turmoil of delicious excitement, Ford had gone with his brother to the field. About twenty of them had entered the little manhole that was the vessel's entrance, the younger members of the group whose money and brains had gone into the construction of the rocket, and a number of mechanics, of whom Paul was one. Two or three women had been among them, wives and sweethearts of the adventurers, laughing and joking with the men as if the undertaking were no more than a pleasure trip.

The huge polished cylinder shone a monstrous ghost-shape in the moonlight. It seemed to shiver and sway.

Then the night was broken by a thunderous roar. The landscape was lighted with sudden terrifying brilliance, and the great rocket went thundering into the skies ahead of a trail

of blinding magnificence, driving through the atmosphere with a deafening screech. In an awful, earth-rocking instant the light had dimmed and the roar subsided. The devilish mechanism that carried his brother was little more than a sputtering light-fleck off there amid the stars.

Astronomers had sighted the rocket and had followed its course as it sped on toward Mars. All had gone well for the first few million miles, and then had come an explosion. But the rocket had not been wrecked, and though it had lurched and spun crazily, it had continued on into Space.

People had supposed that every one on the ship was lost; but Ford had never given up hope of seeing his adored brother again. He had gladly supplied the money for Owen Wardell's attempts to build a space ship, hoping some day to reach Mars.

Below him he saw the clearing on the wooded hilltop where stood Owen Wardell's laboratory, a rambling old structure with a small dome at one end, and he dropped the little antogiro through the red twilight to an open space near by.

"I'm glad you're here!" the scientist greeted him. He ran his fingers through his hair and shook his head as he squinted up at the blood-red sun. "You heard the bulletin from Washington, I suppose? All tommyrot! A hasty piece of guesswork, given out to calm the populace."

They had entered the workshop, and Ford saw that his friend looked tired and worn when he sank into the much-used revolving chair that faced his littered desk. He was more than ever aware of the greatness of the man; of his unselfish devotion to the cause of science.

"You think it is a serious menace to the world?" he ventured.

"I know it, Ford. In the first place, I've maintained all my life that other planets were inhabited by intelligent beings. For that I've been ridiculed by the whole scientific world. Now they will not listen when I tell them that this 'red twilight' is the direct result of certain radiations from Mars, which is now approaching conjunction with the earth—its nearest distance. But I have measured these radiations. Ford, this red twilight is a warlike move of the Martians!"

Ford stared agape. "What effect will it have?"

"I don't know. The world will find out within a few hours. You and I, Ford, are going out there and investigate. We'll make a trip to Mars and find a way to stop it, if the thing proves to be what I suspect."

"You mean," Ford demanded, "that the space ship is completed—a success? That we can do the thing we've talked about for years?"

"Positively." The scientist's eyes softened as they took in the sudden flush of excitement that mantled his young friend's cheeks. "I have taken it out beyond the stratosphere," he said, "and put it through a stiff course of sprouts. It's practical. We'll leave within an hour, if you are willing."

"Willing! But the export business—"

"There'll be no business for many a day! Look!" The scientist flipped the lever of his visiphone and called for a close-up flash of Union Square.

**P**ICTURED in the disk was a restless multitude gazing at the sky.

They jostled and shoved one another, as before. The police were everywhere in the throng, quelling as

best they could the minor riots. The cheering effect of the first bulletin had worn off.

At one point a soap-box orator was haranguing a little group of listeners. Wardell adjusted the focus and tuning.

"I tell you, friends," the wild-eyed speaker was shouting, "the Judgment Day is at hand! Hark not to the pratings of these scientists who would explain the vengeance of an angry God with their talk of harmless natural phenomena!"

Some one in the crowd booed, and a general laugh went up as the speaker fought to maintain his position in the midst of the increasing press. A woman struggled to his side and, flinging her arms over her head, screamed frantic prayers to the crimson heavens. Moaning then, she collapsed and the crowd drew back, suddenly stilled and ashamed.

The speaker's voice rose anew: "It is the last trumpet we are facing, my friends, and it behooves us to make our peace—"

His voice broke off abruptly and the disk went blank as Owen flipped the lever.

"You see," the scientist groaned. "Nothing can convince them that the red twilight is harmless."

Abruptly Owen Wardell rose from his chair, to stare white-faced at a slender tube partly filled with clear liquid. Enlightenment, Ford saw, had come to his friend in that instant.

"My God, Ford, it's the water!" he whispered huskily. "They're stealing our water supply—either to destroy us, or to fill their dried-up canals! See—the level in the graduate has dropped a full cubic centimeter in the past half hour. There'll be drought and famine in the wake of this red twilight. Desperation, and death! It's the end of

things for our world, unless we can head the devils off!"

"You mean to say, it's evaporating?"

"No, it vanishes into thin air without the slightest trace of vapor. In fact, the humidity of the atmosphere has been decreasing."

Suddenly he became active. His lean fingers ran through the papers on his desk and swiftly sorted out a number of sheafs of calculations which he stuffed in his pockets. The visiphone shrilled an insistent call, but he gave it no heed.

"Shall I answer it?" Ford asked.

"All right; but whoever it is will not hold us up now."

Ford flipped the lever. The anxious face which flashed into view was that of an astronomer at Swarthmore Observatory, Dr. John Holden.

"Wardell!" he exclaimed. "I believe you're right, after all. I find these same emanations you reported. And the water, man—it's leaving the earth. The streams will dry up, the lakes. The oceans themselves will be great arid valleys if this keeps up."

"Oh, indeed?" Wardell, too busy to give much attention to the frantic caller, was sarcastic. "So you've come to it at last, have you? Report it to Washington, John. And write a nice long article for the newspapers, too. We're going away from here."

### CHAPTER III

#### ACROSS THE VOID

THE space flyer was a great double-walled egg of metal, with one end flattened to form the base. It rested in a cradle Wardell had constructed on the laboratory roof. Ford and the scientist lost no time in bolting

the airlock door to its rubber seat when they had entered.

"So you discovered the secret at last!" Ford exclaimed as his eyes took in the familiar mechanisms of the control room.

"Yes. The wave forms I had been using were incorrect, though my charging frequency was of the proper value. I can now reproduce or nullify gravity as I wish, or multiply it tremendously merely by altering the charge in the motor spheres."

"And the speed?" Ford grinned as he saw the assured look that crossed his friend's face.

"The speed is ample," Wardell said soberly. Confident though he may have been of his ship, he appreciated the seriousness of their venture.

The motors purred as he threw in the starting switch, and the gentle throbbing of pumps showed that the oxygen apparatus was working.

Though Ford had looked forward to this moment for nearly twenty years, ever since his first talk with Wardell, never had he anticipated the thrill that charged him now as the vessel rocked gently and lifted from its cradle.

"Owen," he said in an awed voice, "this is the greatest achievement of man."

The scientist nodded absently, and increased the repulsive energy. Ford was pressed hard into his seat, and felt giddy. Bending over, he was able to look through the floor port at the red-lit landscape that dropped swiftly away beneath. The laboratory had already merged itself into the crimson-wooded mountains, and, off there to the east, the Hudson River was a slender ribbon of ruddy hue. A moment later it was lost in the red twilight.

Ford shivered. Everything was red.

down there, the color of blood. This thing that was happening to his world was a monstrous nightmare, from which he must soon awaken.

"Owen," he asked, "you honestly think there's a chance of our doing something?"

The scientist shrugged. "I have hopes. If we fail it will be easier to die here than in the mad inferno they will make of Earth."

**F**OUR hours passed. Wardell busied himself with his astronomical instruments, and with a mass of calculations that he was setting down with flying pencil.

The controls of the vessel were set to provide for maximum repulsion from Earth and for maximum attraction to Mars. There was no possibility of swerving from their course. The acceleration was terrific. Ford stole a glance at the velocity indicator. They were traveling a thousand miles a second! And yet the space ship appeared to hang motionless in the void.

Earth was a tiny red orb, all but lost in the background of brilliant light-points that were the stars. The sun, visible only from one of the bunk rooms up top, was a flaming white mass that could not be safely viewed save through semi-opaque screens.

Ford wandered through the vessel, and marveled at the care with which each item of the amazingly intricate mechanisms had been assembled.

Nearly ten years had been spent in the design, the building and rebuilding. There were thousands of parts, manufactured to Owen's specifications in dozens of factories scattered all over the world.

Atomic motors driving gravity-wave generators used ordinary scrap iron as fuel. Disintegrating the atoms of the

metal and utilizing the nuclear energy, they would require only a few pounds of the almost worthless material for the present journey. Motor spheres, charged with this strange and intense energy of the purring generators, were capable of intensifying or reversing the effect of gravitation. The ship was propelled by the attraction or repulsion of the heavenly bodies. Starting with the old Einstein theory of the relation between magnetism and gravitation, Owen had worked out definite usable forces.

Ford climbed to the observation dome up on top and found his friend in a state of great excitement.

"Take a look!" The scientist indicated the eyepiece of a curious instrument attached to the lower end of the telescope.

Ford squinted through the tiny aperture and saw nothing but a weaving light-pencil of green flickering against the dark background.

"What is it?"

"The thing that's causing all the trouble. A beam of invisible vibrations, spanning the heavens in an enormous arc which reaches from Mars to Earth. Just as I suspected: the devils are stealing our water; transporting it over this ray. I made the thing visible by using a fluorescent filter-screen."

"But, Owen, I don't understand." Ford bent over to peer once more through the instrument.

Wardell shrugged. "Neither do I, quite," he admitted. "But it proves that—"

That was the last Ford heard. At that instant the slender green ray spread wide to fill his entire field of vision. With a vivid burst of light it seemed to sweep into his very eyes to strike him down. A shrill vibratory note rose high, to end in a deafening

crash. A violent heaving of the vessel. Darkness.

**W**HEN consciousness returned, slowly and painfully, Ford lay for a long time desperately ill. His entire body was shaken by convulsive twitchings. The very blood in his veins seemed to rush boiling to the extremities of his limbs, to build up pressure that must surely burst through the tortured flesh. His head ached abominably. And then at last came blessed relief.

He rolled over and raised himself groggily on one elbow. Blank metallic walls rose there before his eyes, swaying drunkenly in his blurred vision. Then sudden recollection and the swift return of his normal senses. Things stabilized and he sat up quickly on the edge of the cot. He'd been stretched here in one of the sleeping cubbies of the space ship.

The gentle purr of the motor spheres came to his ears. Too gentle, it was—they were running at reduced speed. Rising up on legs that shook crazily beneath him, he rushed out into the ladder-well, calling loudly for Owen.

He found him in the control room, hunched absordedly over the horizontal disk of a portable visiphone. A monotonous droning voice clipped off abruptly as the older man flipped the lever and swung toward him. Wardell was pale and shaken.

"What's happened, man?" Ford asked thickly.

Owen was running swift fingers over his body, pinching his still tingling flesh.

"Thank God, you've recovered!" the older man exclaimed, dropping his arms. "I feared you were done for. The Martian ray—we drifted directly into it."

"Well, it's got a kick, I'll say." Ford sat down suddenly, his knees giving way in the reaction.

"Right. You took the entire charge. Made a good ground between the telescope and the floor plates, you know. You were stiff as any corpse, paralyzed for hours." There was a suspicion of moisture in Owen's eyes.

"Must be made of tough stuff." Ford grinned. And then he was aware of a slight rocking of the vessel. It had been entirely without motion before. His eyes strayed to the floor port, and he saw a vast sea of rolling clouds beneath them.

"Why, Owen, where are we?" he exclaimed.

"That's the new cloud envelope of Mars," the scientist grunted. "Water from our own Earth. It's raining like the devil down there; I dropped through and saw."

"We're here?" Ford was incredulous. "I was out of the picture that long?"

"Nearly six hours, Ford. And we made the trip, close to forty million miles, in little more than ten."

"Ten hours?" Ford was aghast. Here was vindication of his friend's old arguments against the slow, bulky rocket ships. "What to do now?" he exclaimed in a sudden burst of enthusiasm.

"That's the question." The scientist stared gloomily through the port. "It's a big job we've undertaken. Guess I was crazy to think I could do anything in time."

Ford remembered the voice he had heard. "The visiphone," he exclaimed. "I heard it speak. Was it the Martians?"

"No." Wardell shook his head slowly. "It was the voice of one of our newscasters at home."



"What! 'Way out here?" An awed realization of the vastness of the space that separated them from Earth crept into Ford's whispered words.

"Yes, 'way out here." Owen's voice was listless; tired. "We cannot communicate with them, of course. Our transmitter is too small. But the powerful central stations of the newscasters seem to span the distance easily. We'll know what's going on back there—only too well."

"Things are bad?"

"Bad." The scientist scowled darkly, then reached for the control levers. With a savage jerk he dropped the little vessel into the clond bank below.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### MARS.

OVER the surface of a vast desert land they drifted. The rain beat down in torrents on thirsty sands that soaked it up without leaving the tiniest puddle as evidence of its coming. As far as the eye could see, there was not a trace of vegetation. No living thing was in sight, nor did it seem that life ever had existed in this drab and forbidding wasteland.

"Humph!" Owen grunted. "They surely needed the rain."

"Looks as if this were the first in centuries," Ford commented. He was thinking of what the verdant fields of his own country would look like when the Martians had finished. If there were any Martians.

"Thousands of centuries, more than likely. This planet is ages older than Earth." The scientist lapsed once more into gloomy silence.

A fringe of low hills appeared at the horizon and swiftly drew near. The barren, rocky slopes showed as little

promise of the presence of life as had the desert.

Ford stole a glance at his friend. It was not like Owen to crawl into his shell like this. Was it that he had despaired of success? Or had the visiphone brought to him something upsetting? Ford reached for its lever.

"Don't!" Owen snapped, observing his motion. "Leave the damn' thing alone. It makes you sick." The scientist scowled, and the gray of his eyes darkened with intense feeling. "They're feeding them the same bunk about the cosmic clond. And they've put Holden in jail—the one man among them who has brains enough to learn the truth and who dares to tell it. The fools aren't worth saving."

So that was it! Ford chuckled, relieved in mind. Even in this crisis, in the face of the astounding thing he had accomplished in bridging the unthinkable distance between the two planets, the old tend rankled in Wardell's breast. He never would forget his differences with the accepted authorities of the scientific world.

"Wait until we return," Ford remarked solemnly. "They'll have to change their minds when the thing is done."

"I'll never go back!" the embittered man snarled.

He stared glowering through the floor port. Suddenly his face lighted and he extended a shaking forefinger.

"Look, Ford, look! One of the canals, and a village!"

It was true. The canal, if it could be called such, was a deep gully no less than a mile in width and extending an unbroken straight line in both directions to the horizon. A tiny stream of water that was almost lost in the huge ditch wandered aimlessly over its uneven bottom. This great cut had

been planned by intelligent beings and carved across the surface of the planet in past ages by dexterous hands and ponderous machines.

Sprawling along the crumbling rock-walled side of the canal was a village of conical huts, seemingly constructed of inert stone and mortar. The streets were mere paths connecting the scattered dwellings and running off into the oasis of stunted purple brush that lay alongside.

"Not much engineering ability displayed by the inhabitants of this town!" Owen snorted, dropping the vessel for a closer view.

The rain had ceased falling and the clouds were clearing away. The sun shone out weakly, casting long lazy shadows of the conical huts on the steaming ground. There was an eerie, greenish tint to the sky where it showed through rifts in the scurrying clouds.

At first it seemed that the village was deserted. And then when the sun, which was much smaller than when viewed from the Earth, came into full view just above the horizon, several squat figures emerged from the huts and gathered together in a circular open space near the canal bank. They stood erect, like humans, but on spindly legs that seemed incapable of supporting their chunky bodies. They were clothed from neck to knees in some shimmering material that was fitted closely around the skinny thighs and bloused around the middle.

Their skin, where it was exposed, was white. Not like that of the white race of Earth, but of a sickly pallor like the bleached bones of a skeleton. Somehow, these curious beings struck him as pitiful things.

"Seem to be rather frail, don't they?" Ford remarked.

"You never can tell." Owen had left the ship hovering and was bringing a pair of automatic pistols and a handful of loaded clips. "We'll be prepared for them anyway, if they show fight."

He swung the vessel down over the village now and opened the thick glass door of the floor port. There was a swish as the air rushed out to equalize with the lower pressure of the Martian atmosphere. And a puff of rank vapor drifted in from the steaming brushland beside the canal.

"Hi, there!" the scientist yelled, when they were within fifty feet of the ground. "Look up, will you?"

Startled, the queer creatures craned their short necks skyward. Their open mouths and round, staring eyes could be seen as black splotches against the cadaverous pallor of their broad faces. And then with one accord they scattered and ran to their separate dwellings, where they ducked in through the low doorways.

"Either they're scared out of their wits, or they've gone for weapons," Ford observed, reaching for one of his automatics.

"Neither, I think. See, they're returning—swarms of them."

Hundreds of the gnome-like creatures scurried into the streets, running toward the gathering place over which the space ship hovered. Shouting in thin, querulous voices as they ran, waving their thin arms aloft, with palms spread wide to show they were unarmed.

"Cute little devils," Owen said. "Don't seem a bit frightened, though our vessel must seem like a supernatural monster to them. I'm surprised they're not down on their knees."

"It looks as though they had been expecting us," Ford pointed out.

Owen was thoughtful as he dropped the space ship to within a few feet of the ground in the center of the gathering place where the Martians were assembling.

Chattering in their own outlandish tongue, these undersized beings of another world spread out into a circle completely surrounding the ship of the skies that poised in their midst. One, obviously a leader among them, made bold to step out in the clear space and stand directly beneath the open floor port.

He tossed back his long mane of glistening black hair with a human-like gesture and gazed up at the two Earthmen with shining eyes. In the depths of his wide black optics there was a gleam of friendliness, and his lips opened in a smile of welcome.

"COME down, you Merkans," he called out then in clipped English that brought astonished exclamations from the lips of the Earthmen. "Come down to Tos-kir. Make talk with Neet. We friends."

Ford gripped his friend's arm until it made him wince.

"Did you get that, Owen? He speaks our language! Called us Merkans — Americans! Do you suppose—"

"It must be." Owen rubbed his biceps ruefully. "That rocket wasn't lost twenty years ago. They got it going again in some way; managed to reverse and land here. I've always believed you might find your brother here." Owen wrinkled his brow in thought as he dropped the ship softly to the purple sward. "Don't raise your hopes too high, though. Something is off color about this."

"You mean Neet is lying; that they plan treachery?"

"I think they're honest. But these little fellows are not the only inhabitants. Why, they haven't the knowledge or ability to steal Earth's water! Who then can be doing it but the scientists of that first expedition?" He shook his head. "I feel sure that Earthmen are at the bottom of this. It looks bad to me."

How well they were to recall those words in the dark days to come!

GINGERLY they stepped forth on Martian soil, tottering uncertainly because of the lesser gravity. Their weight here was but little more than a third of what it had been on Earth.

The air was cold and crisp as on a mountain top; but the vapors that rose from the steaming sward reeked of dry rot.

"Say nothing about the rains," Owen warned, when Neet, smiling broadly, advanced to them with hands outstretched, "Have to watch our step until we find out a few things." Ford nodded understanding.

The Martian who spoke broken English raised his voice in a few shrill syllables of his own tongue, and the pressing crowd quieted and drew back respectfully. With his barrel-like chest swelling proudly and his head thrown back that he might look up into their faces from his scant five feet of stature, he addressed the Earthmen:

"Neet glad you come, men from green star. All Tos-kir glad. You stop here for food and for night of sleep?"

There was something pathetic in his childlike eagerness and in the dignity of his pose. Ford turned questioning eyes on the scientist.

"I am afraid not," Wardell replied, shaking his head gravely. "We thank you, Neet, and wish to thank your people. But we must go to your king or emperor without delay."

"King? Emper—what?" Neet's smiling countenance lengthened in puzzled disappointment.

"We wish to see your ruler, the most important personage in your land," Owen explained patiently. "We have tidings from the green star, and must convey them to the great man of this country."

"Ah-h! Bahspahl!" Neet's smile returned. "He greatest in all our world. Neet show you way."

"Is it far?" Ford asked, noting the Martian's swift frightened look in the direction of the space ship.

"Two light-time, one night, if walk," he returned. "Very quick in chariot of air."

"You will guide us there?" Owen questioned him.

"In chariot?" Neet's wide stare was one of mingled apprehension and exultant daring.

"Yes. It is perfectly safe."

"Neet have no fear. Neet come with you." The little fellow drew himself up in swift pride and turned to his people, snapping out short Martian words with all the precise intonation of a drill sergeant.

The effect was magical. The dwarf-folk of Tos-kir set up a cry of lament, their hands upraised to whatever strange gods they might have. Then, at a further barked command of Neet's, they dispersed quickly and made off for their homes.

Neet turned on the Earthmen, grinning wide.

"They not know," he explained. "They fear Neet return no more. But Neet know. Know men from green

star carry him to Thren-dis. Not harm."

"Nervy little cuss," Ford whispered in his friend's ear. Neet walked straight to the entrance manhole of the ship, looking neither to the left nor right, and clambered inside.

"You bet," Owen agreed enthusiastically, "I'll wager his knees are weaker than yours were, that first time you went up with me in one of the old helicopters."

"Oh, shut up!" good-naturedly. "I was a green kid then."

"Green around the gills!" Owen laughed. Their good spirits had returned, though they knew the greatest dangers were still to come.

NEET maintained a white-lipped silence for many minutes after the ship left the ground. He had indicated that they must follow the canal for a space in the direction of the setting sun. And then he clung fast to his seat while they accelerated.

The Earthmen studiously averted their eyes as he struggled with his tears. This mortal terror that came to so many when first they left the ground was a horrible thing.

The shadows below were lengthening as they skimmed swiftly over the rim of the great canal. Above them the sky deepened to an emerald hue. Owen muttered something about an analysis he intended to make of this thin air. Some element that must be present in large quantities was responsible for the green of the heavens.

They saw that the stream at the bottom of the canal had swollen from the rains. Though still shallow, it was a sizable river now.

A larger village slipped past down there, and a city. They shot up to five thousand feet to pass over a mesa that

thrust its sheer chalky walls up from the plain before them.

And then they saw it. A low-lying metal structure atop the mesa. Four immense latticed towers, and a network of gleaming metallic ribbon that stretched between.

"See that?" Owen whispered.

"That rain machine," Neet spoke up, rousing from his lethargy and speaking swiftly as a man does when trying to forget his fears. "Make rain first time to-day. Bahspahl work on it ten, twelve years; promise what it do. We not believe before. Now, all Tiron give thanks to ancient gods. Tiron give water to her people again. Food, health, flowers and birds—all will come back as in long ago."

"Tiron?" Ford gasped. But he knew; in a flash of revelation he had seen what this thing meant to the queer, likable dwarf-folk.

"Ah, I forget," Neet was saying. "You call Mars. We say Tiron. Tiron saved now. Bahspahl do it. He great man of Tiron. Most powerful."

Ford's startled and comprehending gaze locked with Owen's there in the failing light that shone in through the ports.

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## CHAPTER V.

### GOD OF MARS.

**B**YOND the mesa the great canal ended in a huge circular reservoir from which other canals radiated like spokes from the hub of a gigantic wheel. Fully five miles across and shaped like a bowl, its curved bottom was turbulent with the waters that poured in from the great ditches. Muddy, the swirling torrent lapped viciously at the crumbled stone which lined the man-made crater.

Neet squealed in delight.

"See, friends!" he chortled. "It is the beginning of a new age to Tiron. Is it not a miracle, the new water?"

"Hm," Ford grunted, looking longingly at the silent black case of the visiphone. It was a miracle here, no doubt of that. But on Earth, a catastrophe.

It was queer that the rain had abated. Had they abandoned the project? Or was it that—but, of course, Mars was simply turning on its axis in the same manner as Earth. Its day was about an hour longer, that was all, and the projector was no longer on the side facing the green star.

On the morrow it would operate again, and the green star would be no longer green, but red. Fear-ridden and despairing, the people would collect on the streets in the red twilight. Day after day this would go on, until Earth was a parched and dried-out thing. Shriveled, cloudless, bereft of all life. Unless—

"Then-dis!" Neet exclaimed.

They had swept over a ridge of straggling hills. A broad valley of luxuriant cultivated land spread before their astonished gaze. In the center of the checkerboard of carefully tended fields, there rose the tapered spires of a great city. Outlined sharply in its bleached whiteness, it stood out against the dusky blue and purple of the surrounding farmlands, a dream city.

There was a wide central square evenly planted to purplish shrubbery and laid out with broad walks. Fronting on it was an ornate, flat-roofed building of many stories. Earth minds had conceived that edifice in the Renaissance style; an architecture utterly foreign here, among the tapering piles of the Martians.

## RED TWILIGHT

Ford drew in his breath sharply.

"No doubt about the expedition, Owen," he said. "They've done all this. It's new and orderly. Not like the towns and villages of the natives, nor like the ancient ruins we saw along the canal."

"Yes. And see! There are electric street lamps." Wardell was as excited as Ford.

The green dusk had closed in on them, and innumerable light-points flashed into being along the ordered streets. The great central structure—a palace, it seemed—showed glazed windows suddenly alight with warm radiance from within. Homelike; welcoming.

Ford's throat constricted. It was indeed a far cry to Earth, to the things and people he cherished. Perhaps he would never see them again.

WHITE faces were upturned in the square when the space ship settled softly to the pavement. An excited hubbub greeted them. Chattering Martians pressed in close, their gestures friendly. Smiles were welcoming. But Ford's hand closed over the cold butt of the automatic Owen thrust forward, and he tucked it safely in his breast pocket.

Neet, his chest puffed out and his voice raised high, was trying to force a way for them through the crowd. But the people of Thren-dis gave no heed. He was an outlander; a simple-minded villager of the drylands. And they were intensely curious; they wanted to see these oddly-garbed visitors from the green star at close range. Their slim white fingers stretched forth to stroke the leathern jackets.

Pushing good-naturedly and wriggling their way in with sharp elbows prodding, they hemmed in the Earth-

men. Ford thought grimly of the scene in Battery Park after the appearance of the red twilight.

An unceasing metallic clangor rose then in the square, and the elfin faces drew back, sobered instantly. The shrill cries of the gnome-folk were stilled to throaty gurgles of disappointment as two towering figures stalked across the pavement from the palace steps.

Human-like machines of glittering metal, these seven-foot monsters that strode through the shrinking multitude—robots! Their massive iron feet clanged resoundingly on the flagstones, and shining, cable-like arms waved back the crowd. Dome-shaped heads surmounted the cylindrical bodies, with small black disks for mouths and twin lenses for eyes. Expressionless, diabolical things of tremendous power.

"Machine-men of Bahspahl," Neet shrilled. "They not harm. They take us to Square House. Bahspahl control them by voice through the air. He see through their eyes."

The little Martian looked up at them bravely, but there was something of anxiety, something of uncertain terror in his round black eyes.

One of the robots drew near and a raucous voice issued from the tiny black disk there in its domed head.

"You will come to the Boss," it rasped. "He requests it." A many-jointed metallic tentacle-arm stretched forth, wrapping its slim end around Ford's wrist.

"Let go of me, you iron devil!" Ford yelled, reaching for his pistol.

The metal coil relaxed slightly and the radio voice spoke again.

"There is no cause for alarm, men from the skies. It is only that the Boss wishes to talk with you. Will you come?"

"What do you think we intended to do?" Ford growled. These big robots with their staring glass eyes gave him the creeps; they were a loathsome and entirely unwelcome reception committee of this Boss, whoever he might be.

"Easy now, Ford," Owen begged. "Everything seems to be all right. It's only the strangeness of these metal creatures."

The two robots stood passive; waiting. Each turned its staring lenses on an Earthman, entirely ignoring the small figure of Neet, who danced excitedly between their huge hulks. Their every expression was being watched on a viewing plate somewhere in the big house, Ford knew.

"We'll go in," he growled finally.

The tentacle slipped from his wrist and he breathed easier. But his fingers held fast to the pistol-butt as they followed the robots toward the broad steps of Square House, as Neet had termed it. The crowd drew back to a respectful distance, but their willing guide from Tos-kir hurried after them!

A fine state of affairs. Owen must be right. These Earthmen who had come over in the rocket ship might not want them here. The Boss, they were to see the Boss. The designation had an ominous sound, somehow. Bahspahl. The Boss. Boss Paul? Could it be that brother of his?

They slipped through the entrance and the great bronze gates clanged shut behind them, leaving Neet outside. The courageous little Martian had been hopelessly outdistanced.

**A** GREAT blond giant of a man stood facing them across a shining table top in the large room to which they had been conducted by the robots. His iron henchmen had retired to stand motionless at the door.

The Boss's keen blue eyes regarded them unsmilingly; the muscles of his huge chest were tensed with some emotion deep within, where they lay revealed by the skin-tightness of his silken shirt. A heavy, slightly sandy beard hid the expression of lips and jaw, lending a look of savage ferocity. He might have been a Viking of old.

Ford was not surprised to see how much Paul had changed in twenty years; for he had not expected his brother to be the same. Ford stepped forward, his face alight and pulses racing. But the quick scowl and booming voice of this strange brother of his stopped him in his tracks.

"You two are from Earth," the Viking roared. "did you come alone, or are there others?"

"We came alone," Owen replied, with a warning look in Ford's direction, a signal for silence. He was afraid of Ford's impetuosity. The younger man drew back.

"Why did you come?" the giant demanded.

"There were two reasons," Owen returned. "First, there was the matter of the red twilight. Second, we hoped to find trace of a group of scientific men and adventurers who left Earth in a rocket ship some twenty years ago." He smiled guilelessly at his interrogator.

"I see"—with a grunt. "Well, I was one of those rocket travelers. But, what do you mean by the red twilight?"

Owen Wardell cleared his throat. "You have a huge ray projector out there on a mesa, turned on the Earth. You are stealing our water for use on Mars."

"You have found that out, eh? Well, I am. I intend to keep on until we have enough. What has this to do with your

red twilight?" The blond giant was unmoved; merely curious.

"A crimson haze accompanies the action of your ray. The Earth populace is in terror; there is rioting and killing. You are an Earthman—don't you realize what this is doing to your own kind?" There was bitter contempt in Wardell's voice.

The Viking gave an unfeeling laugh. Ford stared at him in amazement. Was this the fine brother whose memory had haunted him?

Owen's tone lowered a little. "If this ray of yours keeps on, a drought is coming down there on Earth such as history has never recorded. There will be famine and death; the horrible torment of maddening thirst. Can you, a man of Earth, bring down this catastrophe on your own race?"

"What about the Martians, the people among whom I have lived these twenty years?" The Viking's voice was terrible. "It is to prevent their annihilation I am doing this. Earth can divide her water with us. What do I care for them? I was never one of them; they cast me off."

"Paul!" Ford shouted, bringing the giant up short.

"You call me Paul?" the big man said in an awed voice.

"Paul Matthews! Don't you remember me? I am Ford, your own brother." He looked at the glittering blue eyes of the giant for recognition, but saw none. "You are Paul, aren't you?" he demanded.

The big man softened then.

"Yes. I am Paul Matthews." A big paw closed down over Ford's hand, gripping it tight. "It all seems so long ago."

Owen's face was still hard, but he spoke more quietly.

"Paul Matthews, you are bringing

sure death to your own kin. Your brother and I ask, in the name of the human race, that you shut off the ray projector."

The giant shrugged, and growled: "I won't discuss it to-day. That is final."

It was not wise to press him, the scientist decided.

"So be it. If there's another room I can use, I'll leave you with your brother."

"Sure, come along!" said Paul almost cordially. "I'll be right back, Ford," he tossed over his shoulder. His voice trailed away.

Ford drew back into the room and stared fascinated at the silent, immovable robots.

**W**HAT power Paul had attained! Strange, though, that he had not been more friendly. He evidently didn't feel the same thrill in the reunion that Ford had. He had been almost ill at ease—furtive, calculating; it didn't fit in with his hard-boiled manner at all. Ford could not down the idea that some ghastly secret was preying on Paul's mind.

Where were the others, those bold spirits who had defied the government and set off in the rocket ship? Surely they were not all dead!

Paul had been the youngest of the lot, but there were plenty of husky fellows among them.

Bahspahl! A name with which to conjure, here on Mars. A god he was, almost, to the dwarf-folk of Tiron.

The eerie stillness of the place oppressed Ford, and the unseeing eyes of the robots' squat headpieces. He turned his back to them, moving over to the table.

Under its transparent covering was a color photograph of a startlingly



beautiful woman of perhaps forty. Beautiful but dangerous. Her eyes were those of a tigress—fierce and compelling in their intense stare.

Something clanged behind him and he wheeled about swiftly to face one of the robots, which had moved from the door. There was cold blue light deep in those lenses of eyes. They were not unseeing now!

Ford's automatic roared deafeningly and one of the lenses crashed in, leaving a jagged hole gaping in the smooth metal of the headpiece. A rasping screech came from the black disk beneath, and the flexible steel arms of the thing were around Ford, crushing his own arms to his sides. He cried out, faint with the pain.

"Paul! Owen!"

The black disk rasped, clucking hideously. Ford's helplessly wriggling body was raised high and he looked down into a yawning pit which had opened at the robot's feet. A great chunk of the smooth floor had silently dropped away. Inside, all was blackness.

Ford's breath was shut off; his ribs cracking with the constriction of those awful metal tentacles. His vision blurred. And then the pressure was suddenly released, he was tumbled headlong through the open trap-door.

Half-conscious, he plunged down into the blackness; squirming. Above him, a raucous laugh—metallic, yet horribly human. Gloating.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



### *Bush Doctors*

**B**EAUTIFUL but serpent-haunted, St. Lucia in the British West Indies offers fertile tracts of land for sale at attractive prices. But no one will buy them for fear of the terrible *fer de lance*, whose bite means an agonizing death within a short space of time. There is no cure for a *fer de lance* bite except immediate amputation of a bitten member. Local bush doctors, however, possess remedies for the bites of other less venomous serpents. Often these native bush doctors are successful in their treatments, which consist of using a series of ligatures and rubbing the wounds with herbs unknown to civilized medicine.

It is locally believed that a bush doctor, if well paid by a patient, will call to him the very snake which did the biting. The snake is then killed and exhibited to the patron as evidence of the bush doctor's magic. But the bush doctor—like other medicos—can kill as well as cure. The credulous say that he can send a snake to bite a person whom he wishes to destroy, and that he can send a snake into a house to steal jewelry or anything else that a serpent might carry in his mouth.

Another feature of the bush doctor's trade is the curing of bites inflicted by humans. Women of the lower classes frequently bite other people when fighting with them. Then the bitten person calls in the bush doctor who not only heals the wounds, but, every one believes, causes the teeth of the biter to drop out.

*C. A. Freeman.*



*Straight into the black pit Ford dropped*

## Red Twilight

*Neither the pleas of fellow humans nor the stealthy, treacherous attacks of half-human monsters shook the determination of Paul, ruler of Mars, to steal Earth's water*

**By HARL VINCENT**

*Author of "Beyond the Dark Nebula," etc.*

### LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FORD MATTHEWS was sitting in the office of his export business near Wall Street one June morning, wishing he could get away from the irksome grind. Suddenly the shrieks of his secretary called attention to a red film which was tinting

the sun. Crowds were soon milling in the streets, as the sun sank in a terrifying red haze. Screams, shouts, moans rang up from the mob, where frightened humans crushed together in a panic.

Ford called a scientific friend on the

visiphone; and was urgently summoned to the scientist's laboratory. While on his way there, he saw that the government's proclamations had calmed the people with a story that the red fog was a passing cosmic cloud.

Arriving at the workshop of Owen Wardell, a brilliant physicist outlawed for his advanced ideas, Ford found to his amazement that Wardell's anti-gravity space ship was completed. True, he had been working on the vehicle for years, but the difficulties were endless. Money for all the experiments had been supplied by Ford, who believed in the project and hoped above hope to reach Mars and find his brother Paul, who had set out for that planet with twenty others in a big rocket ship a score of years before.

Owen Wardell scoffed at the proclamations from Washington, and said that the red light was the result of a ray from Mars—a warlike move of Martians. It was not harmless—for the Earth's supply of water was rapidly disappearing!

Washington would not believe Wardell's explanation, however. Only one solution offered hope. Owen and Ford must set out for Mars.

The space ship proved a great success. Reaching Mars, they were guided by Neet, a friendly little Martian, to the palace of the ruler, Bahspahl. "Boss Paul" was a giant, a human, a great bearded Viking of a man, who confirmed their guess that he was Ford's brother, Paul Matthews, but flatly refused to shut off the deadly red rays. Mars needed the water. The giant Paul did not seem to have the human sympathy which Ford had anticipated.

Paul's bodyguard consisted of two steel robots, grim and evil-looking monsters with arms like massive steel

cables. While Ford was alone with them, one suddenly seized him and hurled him into a black pit which had opened in the floor.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SECRET FORCES.

**D**OWN a long corridor floored with black marble the mighty Paul led Owen Wardell. It did not occur to Owen that they were leaving Ford in danger, even though the two robots were standing in the big room. The scientist was still wondering why Paul was so cold toward his brother.

"It surprises you," Owen asked, "to see Ford here?"

The big man strode on silently at his side, still unwilling to tell what seemed to be on his mind. He had been deeply affected, yet he had acted oddly for one so long gone from his own land. He had asked no word about his father.

"Surprises me, yes," he returned, without enthusiasm. "But I would not have known him. He was quite a youngster then; now he is a full-grown man."

Owen tried another question.

"The arrival of our space ship in the square before your residence was a surprise, of course?"

"Yes, although we always thought one might reach here some day." The Boss raised his eyes.

There was something of suspicion, almost of alarm in the quick look he gave Owen. All was not well in Square House.

"Where are the others?" Wardell asked, thinking of the "we" in the man's hesitant reply to his last question. "Those who came over in the

rocket? There were about twenty, I believe."

A sudden look of ferocity came from under the bushy blond brows.

"Must I give you an account of the past twenty years? I who am master here?"

Owen threw caution to the winds in a flare-up of fury.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "You're an Earthman and should have some sort of feeling for mankind. Instead, you don't give a damn; you met us with open antagonism; your own blood brother means nothing to you, it seems. What the devil is wrong here?"

"You talk to me this way?" The giant's face was gray with anger.

"I do. I'll talk even if you break my neck with those big hands of yours." The lean, bent body of the scientist straightened determinedly.

They had entered the ornamental cage of a lift and the other had placed a hand on the starting lever. He removed it now and the thick fingers twitched. Owen caressed the butt of his automatic where it lay in his pocket. Then the Viking guffawed.

"Forget it!" he laughed. "I suppose I have become peculiar in these twenty years, from your point of view. What of it? I remember your name, Wardell; you were a scrapper in those days. Had the engineering societies in an uproar most of the time."

Owen flushed, but he was relieved. Perhaps, after all, Ford would be able to win over this queer, changeable brother of his. They would have to handle him with care, however.

"Sorry I was hot-headed," said Owen crisply.

"Never mind. We're to have some long talks together, Wardell, about my companions in the rocket ship—" He

hesitated and his lashes flickered strangely. "They have all died," he said brusquely, avoiding Owen's eyes, "except Carlotta, my wife. She was the widow of Charles Best. And her daughter Nina, Best's daughter, born the first year we were here. That is all—three of us."

"It can't be—"

"Yes, let me tell you!" Paul's tongue loosened and the swift words came. "The rocket ship accounted for eight. There was an accident soon after we left Earth. One of the stern tubes blew out, throwing us violently from our course. The shock killed them. Art Carey—you knew him. Davis, Trent, Tom and Mary Baxter—Fields—"

A shot rang out, echoing in the corridor along which they had come. Owen yelled; there was no mistaking the roar of that .38 Colt.

"Ford!" he shouted, leaping through the door of the lift. "It's him, Paul—his gun!"

In a single bound the Boss had passed him and was running with great strides toward the room they had left. His furious bellows echoed awesomely in the long, empty hall.

OUT of breath from his exertions, Owen stumbled into the room—not ten steps behind the big man of Square House. Paul Matthews was standing, petrified, before the still form of one of the robots close to the table. The irregular trap-door had closed again, and no line showed where it had opened.

Ford was not there.

"Where is he?" Owen demanded of Paul.

Paul turned on him fiercely. "Don't ask me!" he roared. "Look! Do you realize what's happened?"

His finger pointed to the headpiece of the robot. Owen saw a ragged opening where one eye had been. Paul's finger was trembling—with rage, or excitement. He seemed to be amazed at the turn of events, though he might have been acting.

"Ford's bullet!" Owen cried. "The damn' thing was after him." He turned fiercely on Paul. "What are these machine-men, anyhow? Who owns them? Who controls them—and what are they trying to do to us?"

The big man's face went rigid, and his lips met in a straight line. He would not answer.

Owen's eyes again took in every part of the big room. Ford had vanished as if by black magic. The scientist closed his fingers on the butt of his pistol; had Paul covered.

"Find your brother at once," he threatened, "or I'll kill you."

The giant laughed harshly, a sinister rumble.

"Put away that gun, you fool, if you want to see Ford alive. You could never get him back. Maybe I can. There are dark forces on this planet—things you never dreamed of on Earth."

The bearded giant was across to the table in a bound, glaring at a small black cube. Talking. Owen hesitated, his finger trembling on the trigger of the automatic. Paul waved him away, scowling and shaking his head. He returned the pistol to his pocket, suddenly ashamed. Paul was not the cause of his brother's disappearance. He seemed as astounded as Owen.

"Carlotta!" Paul was saying. "You are in your room? Good, I must see you at once." He left off the use of English and spoke rapidly a few harsh words in the outlandish tongue of the Martians.

"Stay here," he said to Owen, "and keep out of this. It's for your own good and Ford's."

Then he was out of the room, and Owen heard his ponderous running footsteps in the hall, dying away. A moment later Owen was after him; saw him turn a corner and vanish in a side passage.

Silent as a tomb the gloomy halls of Square House were now. With his heart pounding, with eyes and ears alert, and with the automatic pistol gripped in tense fingers, Owen went in the direction Paul had taken.

At the end of the small side passage was a metal door. There was no knob or latch. He pushed his shoulder against it. Slowly it yielded, and Owen thrust his pistol forward as he peered through the crack. A small room was beyond, empty.

When he entered he thought he heard voices behind a second door which opened from the tiny cubicle. Martian voices! Shrill and unintelligible. They were approaching.

He drew back into a corner as the second door swung open. Two of the gnome-folk came in, jabbering excitedly in their own tongue. They were attired in tight silken shirts and knee-length breeches of shiny stuff like patent leather, as Bahspahl had been. But the costume had lent the air of a swaggering buccaneer to the big American. It served only to make the small Martians ridiculous. Their bloated chests, large ears and spindly limbs made them seem like grotesque, dressed-up marionettes.

They passed through the cubicle without seeing Owen. Beyond the second door another hall extended. Like the rest of the mansion, it was lighted with a soft golden glow from walls and ceiling. At the end of this hall

Owen came to a narrow, unlighted passage. He stopped, listening; he thought he heard a voice, harsh and masculine. Then followed hollow, complete silence.

Something clanked there in the darkness, and Owen's heart stood still. A light flashed on, and he saw one of the robots standing at an open door. He had heard a voice; it came through clear and distinct now. Paul's!

The robot's eye-lenses were turned away, so that whoever was at the controls could not see him. The voices came from a door but a few feet away. The robot stood further along the hall. Owen decided to risk being seen by the lenses, and slipped on tiptoes to the door through which the voice was coming.

He saw the robot step back ponderously through another door. The light in the narrow passage flashed off. In a room of luxurious hangings and heavy with the odor of incense a man and a woman were talking. Paul and Carlotta. Owen slid in through the door, which was ajar, and secreted himself behind a painted screen that stood there. He could see them through a narrow slot that divided the screen vertically.

She was a magnificent specimen, this Carlotta. Almost an Oriental. As dark as Paul was light, she was an alluring exotic beauty. Reclining on a low, cushioned affair like a *chaise longue*, her superb figure was covered only by the flimsiest of material. Long black lashes lay on her smooth creamy cheeks. Scarlet lips were drawn in a tight line as Paul talked.

Her eyes startled Owen when she raised the long lashes. Mysterious fires burned in those intense orbs. Their color was indeterminable, but he knew they were dark. Hypnotic; insistent. A

man like Paul Matthews would do much for such a woman.

"PAUL," she was saying, and her voice was like a purring kitten's, "what's this man like—this one who claims to be Ford?"

"A handsome devil, and well set up. Just the sort I would expect him to be. Fearless, too. I hope they didn't get him; those devils down there"

So Paul Matthews did have human feelings. Owen pricked up his ears.

"Don't worry," the woman said. "They'll be in time, Misor and Zan. We'll know in a few minutes."

"Ought to go below myself," Paul said gloomily.

"No, no—Paul!" The woman sat erect, her face draining of color. "Tell me you'll never go down! For Carlotta—please!"

There was stark terror in her voice. A deep mystery was here. Owen felt again the power of mysterious forces that lay beneath the calm exterior of Square House. Something deep and terrible—so terrible that it could not even be mentioned.

"You win; you always do." Paul raised his great bulk wearily, then paced the floor like a caged beast. The woman's eyes followed him warily.

Owen was puzzled. One minute it seemed that those astounding orbs were adoring the big man who paced there; worshiping him beyond the ken of any mortal. The next instant they were hating, with bestial fury!

A voice whispered from one of those black cubes on a taboret close by the screen. Owen shrank back. Paul was electrified. He touched a switch, and the voice spoke up louder in the shrill sibilants of a Martian.

Paul replied swiftly and in furious tones, using that gibberish of the

dwarf-folk. Owen could have cried out in his uncertainty. This was torture.

"There are the radium pits yet," Paul was saying, "and the branch aqueducts. Find him!" The big fellow dropped into his chair once more and sat with head bowed in his hands.

"Of course they'll find him." The woman's voice was soothing.

Yet Owen experienced a chill of sudden foreboding. This woman was a dual personality. She could be a vicious Jezebel in one rôle, a saint in the other. And Owen was convinced by what he saw in the swift cruelty of that beautiful face that she knew what had happened to Ford—had a hand in it herself.

*Click!* A rope of cold steel twined around Owen's neck, choking him. Bodily he was lifted from where he crouched and swung high in the air; shaken crazily by that chill thing which gripped him.

His vocal cords paralyzed by the pressure, he could not cry out. His eyes saw only a bloody haze. Like the red twilight, it was. Drifting, swaying, his senses reeling—Something broke then in his mind—sounded like a pistol shot—

He knew no more.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CAVERNS OF TERROR.

FORD MATTHEWS heard the trap-door shut with a thud as he dropped swiftly into the blackness. He struggled to right himself, that he might land on his feet. If the pit ended in a solid bottom, he might manage to escape with no more than a broken leg. If there was water, his body would cleave it.

Down he sped in the foul inkiness. His mind, he knew, was working with extreme rapidity. There was water down there—he smelled it.

He struck its rankly odorous surface with a splash that echoed deafeningly in his ears. His body drove into its depths swiftly and cleanly. Down he went like a plummet. It was bitter cold and bitter to the nostrils, that foul liquid into which he had been flung. Water? This was sewage, more likely.

Powerfully he struck out, and it seemed he would never reach the surface. His lungs were bursting, and little light-flecks danced before his open eyes. There was nothing to be seen in the swirling darkness, but these flickerings told him he could not hold his breath an instant longer.

And then, when he was at the limit of endurance, he thrashed out on top. Drawing the vile air into his lungs in convulsive sobbing gulps. Drifting in the sluggish, sucking current.

Whoever it was that operated the radio control of the robot, had seen to it that the metal monster made a thorough job of it. This place was a horrible death chamber. Dark as a pocket and reeking of poisonous corruption. Ford swam slowly and with frequent rests, floating to conserve his strength.

Endless time passed, dragging. His stroke was feeble now; muscles refused his bidding. Then his hand encountered a rock wall. Stiff fingers closed on a projecting stone and he clung to it, panting.

Off there in the darkness was a faint green light. Shivering, he regarded it. He knew he could never span that distance swimming. Then too, it looked more like a patch of phosphorescence than daylight or any ordi-

nary artificial light. He was done for, unless he could get solid ground under his feet; his teeth chattered with the cold, and he was dizzy with weakness.

An eerie scream rang through the cavern, clamoring wildly from unknown depths and reverberating in the unseen vastness of the place. A crackling flash then, like the lightning of Earth, illuminated huge stalactites, icicle-like, high overhead. In that brief instant he also saw a narrow ledge along the rocky wall.

He reached out weakly. With his last ounce of energy he pulled himself up and lay there gasping.

**S**LOWLY Ford's strength returned. In a languid half-stupor he lay hardly caring whether he lived or died. Thinking. Trying to figure things out. Some awful menace hung over Square House; he had sensed it in his brother's manner. Something they feared up there; a power they could not fully comprehend or overcome. It couldn't be the gnome-folk. They were harmless enough—friendly. What then? Evil minds were at work somewhere about the place. Devilish hands had operated the robot control.

Strange rustlings and whisperings came from out the darkness and Ford staggered to his feet. Straining his eyes in the Stygian gloom, he heard them again; faint whistling twitters. A cold chill chased down his spine. He felt his way along the ledge, advancing toward the distant green luminescence.

His heart did a flip-flop at sound of a soft voice close at hand. A girl's voice, throaty and mellow. Halting abruptly, he stood there in the blackness, waiting. Holding his breath.

"Earthman!" the voice called softly. "Are you there?"

"Yes. Who are you, and where?"

"I am Nina—a friend. Stay where you are, Earthman. I will come to you."

Who was this woman whose soft footsteps padded over the stones, drawing near? If a Martian, she had learned English perfectly. It was not with the broken, halting speech of Nect she spoke, but with carefully modulated, cultured accents. A youthful voice, vibrant.

Whether to expect a knife thrust out of the darkness, or whether this was a genuine act of friendliness, Ford was uncertain. He could hear the girl's breathing now; she was feeling her way carefully along the ledge. And he crouched alert, tense.

"Speak to me." The low whisper was almost in his ear. "Let me hear your voice, so I will know where you are."

"I'm here, not three feet away." He ran his fingers over the damp stone in the direction of the voice; encountered a small warm hand stretching toward him.

"Ah-h!" the girl sighed tremulously. "Thanks be to the gods, I have found you, Earthman!" Her soft fingers clutched his own.

Ford thrilled unaccountably at the contact. "Who are you?" he demanded. "Why are you here, in this hell-hole? Why was I set upon by the robot and flung—"

"Sh! Not so loud. And not so fast. I am Nina, of Square House. I learned of what happened to you. There are evil forces of which I may not speak—it is forbidden. But I shall lead you to safety, Earthman."

"Thanks"—dryly. "It seems Owen and I are unwelcome visitors, to some one."

The girl's fingers were pulling at him, gently impatient.



"It is very good of you, Nina. May I call you that?" He was stumbling after her in his blindness, clinging to her firm slender hand.

"Why not? I am Nina. And who are you, Earthman?" There was unaffected candor in the low voice; natural curiosity.

"I'm Ford Matthews, late of New York and Westchester." He tried to be flippant, but his heart pounded.

"Ford—Matthews! Brother of Paul?" The girl's fingers went limp in his hand, then tightened.

"Yes."

"He knows?" The voice of this Nina was faint and incredulous.

"I told him. Within two minutes that cursed iron man had dumped me down here." Ford's ire was rising. Queer doings in this place, and an undertone of intrigue he didn't like.

"Oh, oh!" the girl was moaning softly. "This is awful!"

Another of those ghastly shrieks echoed in the vast arches of the cavern. A second lightning flash. Ford jerked his head around and saw her sharply outlined against the dripping wall in the brief glare. Dazzling in her wild beauty. A slim figure, shrinking from the light, clad only in a closely fitted swimming-garment. A halo of glorious hair, flashing golden in the swift light. The wide eyes of a frightened child. Parted, trembling lips.

"You're beautiful!" he gasped.

Darkness swallowed her up. There was no response; only a shuddering intake of her breath. Soft fingers fluttered in his grasp.

"**Q**UICK—this way!" the girl was whispering. Tugging with sudden vigor. "In here!"

He saw a dim light and ducked into a low passage after her.

A blue-green flickering came from the walls of the tunnel, giving sufficient light to show the footing.

The girl ran swiftly, and Ford followed on her heels. She was a dim, wraithlike Diana leading him he knew not where. The phosphorescence intensified before them, and she drew close to his side once more, lagging in her steps.

"One of the radium pits!" she explained. "We must be very careful."

Hand in hand again, like two children, they wormed their way out of the constricted mouth of the tunnel onto a narrow shelf circling the inner wall of the green-lit pit. There was a boiling horror down there, a hundred feet below them. A swirling mass of liquid light that sputtered, hissing as thick bubbles gathered and burst, shooting ghastly tongues of sulphurous flame licking upward from the surface.

They hugged the wall and edged along the shelf toward an opening that yawned black on the opposite side. One false step of either and they would have been hurled into the horrid living fire of the pit whose rank odors seared their nostrils, whose weird radiations made awful purple splotches of their flesh and filled the air with tiny charges of energy that scintillated before their eyes.

A gasp came from Nina, and then a pitiful moan. Ford saw that she had cast her eyes into the depths of the pit. Her fingers clutched at him desperately. He followed her gaze.

"What is it?" he yelled.

Then he saw. A shriveled, hairless, ape-figure was crawling laboriously upward from the depths, clinging to ledges and crevices in the wall of the pit. Long arms reached out and pawed blindly for hand-holds. The misshapen body gleamed with a horrible metallic

luster. Deep black hollows for eyes in the flattened, featureless face. Sightless! Writhing lips of a yellow-fanged mouth. A gruesome creature that had once been a man.

Nina stifled a scream, and covered her eyes. She was trembling. Shaken with horror, Ford vainly tried to soothe her.

"It's he!" Nina sobbed. "I know it's he!"

Then like a frightened gazelle she was off down the passage. It was all he could do to keep pace with her. The tunnel was lighted dimly with the golden glow of regularly spaced disks set in the wall. It must be they were nearing the entrance of Square House.

Two Martians hove into view as he turned a corner.

The girl flung herself, shrieking, in their ready arms.

"Zan! Misori!" she cried. "Take me inside! See that the Earthman is brought through—Oh! I saw him!"

She collapsed, moaning.

"YOU wear this," one of the dwarf-men was saying. He held a black cap of closely woven material in one hand.

"You wish to blindfold me?" Ford raged.

"Yes. Bahspahl command," the Martian intoned smoothly.

"Please put it on, Ford!" Nina begged, arousing. Those wide, dark eyes beseeched him. Tears trembled on the long lashes. What was a man to do?

He walked endlessly in the darkness of the black cap, with a Martian hand clinging to his arm. Up countless stairs. Dank, musty odors pungently assailing his nostrils. The opening and closing of many doors. And then a breath of air, perfumed air. The cap

was whisked from his head and he stood there blinking in the soft light of a lady's boudoir.

Paul was there, and the woman. Nina, the two Martians. Owen—stretched moveless on a low divan.

Paul was bellowing. He gripped the shoulders of the girl Nina fiercely.

"How many times have I forbidden you to enter the diggings?" he demanded. "If it happens again, I'll—"

"Paul!" Ford raised his voice angrily. "You're hurting the girl. She was only—"

"Silence! Brother or no brother, I'm ruler here! I'll manage my own household."

Nina had scurried from the room. Ford faced Paul defiantly, his eyes almost on a level with the pale blue ones that pierced him.

"A rotten household!" Ford grated. "With your murderous robots and heaven only knows what monsters living down below. What ails Owen?"

He went to the scientist's side. Feeling for his pulse, raising his lids. A great welt extended across his friend's forehead and ugly bruises showed at his throat. But the pulse was regular and his breathing steady. Knocked out, that was all—he'd be coming around in a few minutes.

But Ford was furiously angry. He jumped to his feet, snarling:

"More work of your iron killers! What does it all mean—what I saw below; the blindfolding? Answer me!"

The woman had risen with a smile, ready to greet Ford in drawing-room manner, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. At his outburst she sobered, her eyes wary and little body tensed like a cat's.

The big man clenched a huge fist, then dropped it to his side. His scowl gave way to a haggard, beaten look.

"I can't tell you," he growled. "Listen, Ford: nobody invited you, here. You have no rights. You'll have to take things as they are. Certain affairs you must not know. I say hands off—get it?"

A glance passed between Paul and the woman. Ford thought he saw swift triumph in her eyes. He felt his hands clenching. If he could only get to the bottom of this hidden tragedy!

## CHAPTER VIII.

### STOLEN RAIN.

**L**ATE the following morning Ford met Owen in the comfortable library of the suite assigned to them. They had slept long, exhausted as they were. Though both were stiff and sore, they were much refreshed, almost encouraged. Suddenly Owen asked:

"What do you think of Carlotta Matthews?"

"Can't make her out," the younger man replied. "Whether she's just one of those intense, capricious creatures or a she-devil."

"Nor I. The woman is madly in love with Paul, but still I don't trust her. She's a good nurse, though, I'll say that." The scientist screwed up his eyes comically from under the bandage she had placed over his wound.

"H'm! I saw she was very gentle with you, and you didn't seem to mind a bit." Ford chuckled.

"You weren't backward with little Nina," his friend retorted.

Ford caught his breath. The girl had got under his skin. Then, startled, his gaze turned to the broad window that faced out on the Square. It had darkened suddenly outside and torren-

tial rains were sweeping across the pane.

"Look, Owen! They've started the projector. We must do something about it—at once!"

"Yes"—dryly. "We must speak to Paul. Perhaps he will shut it off."

"Tell you what, Owen; we'll get the visiphone and show him. Let him see and hear what's happening on Earth. For all his gruffness and his secrets, he has a heart—"

"Bahspahl send for you," a Martian voice interrupted from the door. The servant Paul had turned over to them stood there smiling.

"All right, Quin."

Ford chuckled when the little fellow had bowed himself out.

"Makes me think of an Irish office boy of mine—name, grin and all."

He sobered then, and glanced out at the dark downpour with a shudder. His thought of the cheerful Irish kid turned to agony as he realized what a hell of terror the blood-red drought was now making on Earth; what gruesome horrors his friends and his loved ones were suffering. Gangs must be roaming the streets, stealing what little water there was, looting and killing. Cities burning, without the water to put them out. Mob of fanatics storming the government, hanging, lynching, howling with insane glee, trampling the weak under foot. He could imagine the wails of stricken women, men and children, as humanity saw its precious water supply vanishing.

**B**OSS PAUL was in a bitter mood when he met them in the big room.

"Good morning," he said, but there was little cordiality in his tone.

They returned his salutation.

"Good breakfast?"

"Except for the blue melon," Owen

objected, with a wry face. Paul scowled. It was not an encouraging start.

"You agreed to consider shutting off the main machine," Ford said.

"I did, though I doubt if what you say will change my plans."

Ford turned to the scientist. "Will you rig up the visiphone, Owen?"

"Yes. If there's an umbrella—"

"Quin can go with you," growled Paul.

Ford had been examining the floor where the trap-door had opened. There was not the slightest evidence of its existence. He looked at his brother long and earnestly, remembering that night when the great rocket had screamed into the skies.

"Paul," he said, "why don't you drop this rain idea and return to Earth with us? You can bring Carlotta and Nina. Let the Martians shift for themselves."

Paul's eyes held a far-away look for a moment, then flared defiance.

"No! You don't understand; you never will. The Runds—that's what the Martians call themselves; we called them 'runts' when we first came—are a helpless people. We belong to them. We never hoped to leave Mars, as the explosive required by the rocket ship couldn't be duplicated here, so we made ourselves part of their lives. Their problems are ours. If they do not have this water they will die off in less than five Tironian years. They must have it at any cost."

"There is no other way of obtaining it?"

"None."

"But there are other planets."

"I've tried them. None of those having water will yield it but Earth. I don't believe it will be as serious for them as you think; I'll leave some."

Paul's voice had a cold ring to it that made Ford shiver. For he knew that even with a small part of Earth's water stolen, the thing meant untold disaster.

"How many of these Runds are there?" he asked, trying a new tack.

"About two million. They are scattered over a few thousand square miles along the equator. The rest of the planet is dead—parched and lifeless. We circled it for many days before we landed, looking for signs of habitation."

"And for only two millions of the odd gnome-folk you'd sacrifice many times that number of your own kind—hundreds of millions, maybe? I'll admit the Runds are likable; pathetic in their downfall from the ancient glory and might of their ancestors, but—"

"That's enough! There are other reasons."

The Boss rose, jerkily. His eyes were haunted now, staring into the depths of that dread secret which seemed to be with him always.

O WEN entered, shivering, and shaking the water from his eyes.

He set the visiphone on the table with a triumphant gesture.

In rapid technical language he gave Paul the story of this marvelous development of television that had come since the rocket left Earth. Told of the Newscasters who delved into and spread afar all secrets of this latter-day world of theirs. Of their great central transmitters which could span these millions of miles of empty space. And the Boss listened absorbedly.

"Let's see it work," he demanded.

"—while from Kansas come the reports that the wheat crop is utterly blasted." The voice of the announcer was panicky. "An exceptionally large crop was in prospect for this year; now

it seems there will be none. The rich fields are—but wait; here is an image flash from Wanaque Reservoir in northern New Jersey."

The announcer's visage faded from view and his voice broke off. Ford's throat tightened with homesickness. Paul's face was a mask.

A second announcer took over the newscast. On the disk was pictured a great wall of concrete and a broad expanse of red-lit waters. The angle of the view was such that they saw the sun low on Earth's horizon, a vast globe of smoldering fire. Crimson! The color of blood.

"You will observe there is no water spilling over the dam," came the eerie voice from out the vastness of space. "Already the level has dropped more than two feet under the dire influence of this red curse that has come to our world. And to-day the rate of evaporation is even more rapid—"

"Evaporation!" Paul snorted.

Owen was watching him keenly. He must learn the secret of this pilferage of Earth's water. True, there had been no evaporation.

The scene changed. International Newcasts were providing an aerial survey for their patrons. A transmitter was being carried over certain badly affected sections of the middle west.

The voice of the announcer droned on as they passed over a rolling countryside. "That tiny trickle at your right was a sizable river two days ago. It was fed by many smaller streams that now are entirely dried up. That pond—there, you see, directly ahead—was a lake. Observe the whitening cracks in the caked mud surrounding the shrinking pool. The livestock you see wandering aimlessly over the fields are searching for water. Ranches are being deserted by their owners, who

have fled to the cities, especially around the Great Lakes."

Ford noticed that Paul's fingers tapped the table casually. He was bored, or else he was thinking deeply. His bearded face, alight from flickering reflections of the disk, was immovable.

"**N**OW we turn you over to the news center in Washington," the voice droned on. "Official warning is given that the militia and the police will not tolerate gatherings in the public places. Martial law has been declared, and hysterical demonstrations such as those of yesterday are not to be permitted. Citizens are further cautioned against indulging in undue excitement over the red twilight. It is safest to remain in your homes and await the passing of this second cosmic cloud. The Naval Observatory reports it much smaller than the first; it is to be passed through quickly. Heavy rains are to be expected late this afternoon east of the Mississippi."

"Fakers!" Owen scathed. "Why do they keep up this deceit? Fools! They build up public faith, only to destroy it."

A swelling murmur came from the viewing disk. They saw a crowd storming the portals of a great public building—the Capitol.

"As if Congress could do anything about it!" Owen said bitterly.

Shots rang out. There were desperate men in that mob, unreasoning and fear-crazed.

A stentorian voice was calling for them to disperse. They saw a machine gun crew crouched along the wall. More shots and little puffs of white dust spurting from the wall near the khaki-clad gunners. One of the sol-

diers, a young boy—they could see his smooth cheeks plainly—rose clutching at his throat, amazed disbelief written in his agonized countenance. Then he toppled amongst his fellows.

The hideous stuttering of machine guns. Frantic screams from the mob. Bodies piling there; wounded men and women crawling over them, whimpering. The pavement slippery with blood. And the red twilight brooding darkly over all.

"Enough!" Paul shuddered. "Turn it off. I don't want to see such things. Turn it off, I say."

There was a click and the disk became dark.

"COME," said Paul, and he strode from the room.

Ford and Owen followed, still breathing hard. It had been a terrible thing to see their fellow men wallowing in their own blood, vainly spilling it in frantic conflict with the inevitable.

They came out on a balcony overlooking the Square of Thren-dis. The heavens had opened to spout forth such a deluge as had not come to the planet Mars in a thousand centuries. The great plaza was a wading pool where hundreds of half-naked Rund children splashed and cavorted in their glee. Their elders watched them from the sidelines, and on every round face was a happy smile. Little they cared that their clothing was soaked; that their feet were in water to the ankles. It was their salvation, this miraculous rain the Bahspahl had brought to them. Tiron was to have a new lease of life. Once more it would bloom with sweet flowers.

"Another story, you see," Paul said solemnly.

"But see here!" Owen cried in panic

at seeing how moved the big man was by the Martians' joy. "There must be some other way. Shut off this ray generator of yours, and I'll work out some other way of getting water."

"You've never done it, have you?" Paul demanded gruffly. "Disintegrated the atom?"

"Yes—the fuel of my space ship. Let me—"

The big man broke in with a short laugh.

"Fuel! That's nothing! I could do that five years ago—simple disintegration. The man who discovered that for me—he's a Rund—has tried everything. Lives with his books and calculations. There's only one way to get water on Mars—"

"Listen to me!" said Owen crisply. "I don't care what you've tried. You may have overlooked the simplest way. You don't want to change the climate all at once, anyhow—the Runds would die. They aren't used to it. Turn off the machine for ten days, and I'll have water for you—I swear it!"

Paul turned away impatiently and gazed across the dripping Square for several minutes. Then he growled, as though he was ready to hate these Earthmen for interfering with his plans:

"You're right so far—the Runds couldn't stand a rainy climate suddenly. Take the ten days. That's long enough for you to learn how tough this water proposition is."

He strode to a visiophone cube near the door of the balcony and gave curt orders to the men running the ray projector up on the mesa.

Nina was there; she'd been watching them from inside. Her fresh young beauty smote Ford anew. He moved to her side, the hot blood mounting to his temples.

But the girl was listening to Paul where he spoke rapidly into the black cube. And a look of horror crept over her cameo-like features as the words rattled forth.

"No, no!" she moaned when he had finished. "You can't cut off this beautiful rain! The Runds—they will suffer again."

"Hush, Nina! They can't stand much water. They aren't used to it." The big man of Thren-dis looked down on her with amused tolerance.

"But the ray machine may not work next time! You've been trying for this rain ever since I can remember. And now when you have it you listen to these Earthmen and shut it off!"

She turned from him, bending her tearful gaze on Ford.

"Oh, why did you come here? Why have you used influence on him?"

Weeping, she ran from the room.

## CHAPTER IX.

### TEN DAYS OF HOPE.

WITH Owen spending every waking hour in the laboratory of Square House, or out in the huge workshop on the mesa of the rain machine, Ford was left with much time on his hands.

But it did not drag. The girl Nina had taken him in tow, no longer rebellious that the rain had been shut off. She was a Martian, however, born and brought up among the Runds; as much one of them as if her sympathetic spirit had been housed in a gnome-body. She could not see why the people of Earth were more deserving of the benefits of the rain than they.

Ford explained patiently, telling her of the seriousness of the situation in his own land, the land of her father

and mother. He pictured vividly the things he had seen; tried to tell her of the vast numbers of the Earth folk, of their lives and ambitions. But his people did not impress her as particularly admirable. To her they seemed foolish in the face of a dangerous drought. The Runds had fought the same battle bravely. She was resigned to the action of her stepfather only on the basis of his ten-day promise.

Carlotta, he found to his surprise, treated him with the utmost respect and with friendly overtures that certainly were sincere. And she was more than tolerant of his growing friendship with the daughter.

They spent many hours, he and Nina, rambling in the streets and public places of Thren-dis. She took him into the homes of many gnomes and proudly exhibited him to her friends. To them, it was apparent, she was a goddess, to be adored along with the ancient gods of their ancestors. She had interceded at Square House for many of them in the past. She was the guardian angel of Thren-dis and of all Tiron.

Ford managed to pick up a few words of the queer language of the Runds. At the end of the fifth day he found that he was enjoying himself hugely. And, strangely, his heart went out to these gnome-folk who were beloved of Nina.

There was a wheezing and rattly old automobile, built years ago by engineers out of parts taken from the rocket, and used in a vain search over a large part of Mars for certain chemicals. Carefully built, it was still in fair shape. As Owen and Paul were using the space ship in their frequent visits to the mesa, the "fire chariot" was at the service of Ford and Nina.

Carlotta refused to be budged from

her comfortable quarters in Square House, but the young couple made numerous trips over the hard-packed sands of the drylands and along the canal banks in the bouncing old car.

On one of these excursions they stopped beside an ancient canal-lock whose crumbling ruins had become a favorite spot from which to view the sunset. Ford had not got over the wonder of these iridescent purple sunsets of Tiron.

"You love all this, don't you, Nina?" he asked, when they had rested in silence for many minutes.

"It is my life. Of course I love it. I should die if I were to leave it."

"You would not care to visit Earth?" Ford was contemplating the smooth whiteness of her throat as he asked the question. He saw the muscles tense under the velvet skin.

"I'd hate it. There's wickedness on Earth. And avarice; greed that destroys. My own father—" The girl bit her lips and the color went from her face. She stared off over the drylands.

"Go on," Ford said gently.

"No." Her voice was choked but determined. "It is forbidden. I must say no more. Shall we return to Square House?"

Nina was moodily silent throughout the drive homeward.

PAUL and Owen joined them for dinner that night, something they had not done for several days. Both were gloomy and preoccupied.

"Any luck?" Ford inquired of his friend.

"None thus far. But I still have hopes."

"You don't seem very enthusiastic."

"It's the Runds, Ford. Their staring

eyes and bleached skins. They look at me out there, the workmen, as if I were robbing them of their hope of continued life. And it is so. The drylands are now as terrifying as before; the canals are parched."

"You two mustn't be talking shop," Carlotta reproved them from the head of the table.

She smiled in the approved manner of a hostess of Earth.

"Your pardon," Owen said politely.

Nina spoke up with some small talk of the gnome-folk.

It was all so like a similar scene back home that Ford sat staring with his fork poised in mid-air. Were it not for the silent and efficient Runds who served the Martian vegetable courses, he might have thought he was dining with friends in Larchmont or New Rochelle. To think that the fate of worlds lay in the hands of two men at this table; that horror and dark mystery stalked in the sub-surface realm beneath them was mad imagining.

And then the lights were extinguished. An explosive grunt from Paul; Nina's low, startled cry. But not a sound from Carlotta.

"Keep your seats!" Paul commanded.

They heard Paul's chair flung violently on its back; his heavy steps as he blundered through the darkness, followed by soft, rustling sounds.

"Let me go with you!" Ford pleaded, rising precipitately. His plate clattered to the floor, making a hideous racket as it fell.

"Ford, better take it easy," Owen said calmly.

"Devil take him!" Ford snarled. "For two cents I'd—"

"You'd do nothing of the sort. Sit down." Owen was unmoved.



"Nina!" Ford whispered.

Still no reply. The others must have gone with him.

"Well, this is the damndest place I've ever seen!" Ford growled. He felt for his chair and slumped to its padded seat.

"I agree with you," Owen whispered. "Ford, there must be human beings down there in the diggings. Prisoners or slaves—victims of Paul's love for his Martian people, perhaps, or madmen."

"You mean—"

"Some of those who came in the rocket ship! How else could all these mysterious things happen? One of them with a robot-control must have sent the mechanical men to kill us. I'm sure it wasn't Paul."

"Then they are enemies of Paul and of us?"

"Exactly."

Ford's mind was in a whirl. Was Paul keeping some of the survivors of that expedition out of sight for a purpose? Or had they willingly leagued themselves with other monsters who dwelt in those fearsome diggings?

The diffused light of walls and ceiling flickered on now, dimly. Steadied to normal brilliance. The other places at the table were empty, as Ford had guessed.

"At any rate," he said after a silence, "Paul seems to have the upper hand, and the confidence of the Runds. They worship him!"

"They should," Owen returned feelingly. "He has educated them, taught them the forgotten arts of their ancestors, made scientists of some."

"Yes, and they bear out his story of the deaths of the others. But they are reticent, at that. The last, they say, died soon after the completion of Square House, when Thren-dis was

still in construction. What a strange state of affairs!"

Paul entered the room, smiling, with the ladies on his arms. As if nothing had happened. But there was a certain shiftiness in his manner, and Carlotta's long lashes veiled her expressive eyes. Nina was ghastly white.

"Just a little trouble with the generators, Owen," Paul blustered, obviously trying to conceal his agitation. "Come ahead, we must get back on the job. You can do without the last course, can't you?"

"Surely." Owen was on his feet, moving with alacrity to follow.

**E**IGHT of the ten days for Owen's experiment had passed when next

Ford had opportunity of talking with the scientist alone. The older man was tired and drawn.

"Nothing doing yet," he sighed in response to Ford's anxious query. "It is very elusive, what we are trying to do. Worse, it would seem, than my gravity-wave"

"Think you'll do it by the tenth day?"

"It looks dubious. I'll say this, though: that brother of yours is a worker. He's wearing me ragged. Knows a thing or two, besides."

"Just as anxious as we are, isn't he?" Ford was commencing to feel much of his old admiration for Paul. He had changed greatly, of course, and there was this grim secret of the diggings. But Paul had been through many trials in these twenty years.

"Anxious or not," Owen warned, "he'll stick to his ultimatum of the tenth day."

Ford had been sure of that. Conditions in the Rund villages were growing steadily worse. And then Paul was the sort of man who did what he

## RED TWILIGHT

said he would, there was no halking him.

He followed Owen into his bedroom, where the older man disrobed slowly, with fingers that fumbled.

"Do you know, Ford," he was saying drowsily, "I wish some one else from our world had this job. Some of the smart Alecks who know so much about everything. They'd have something to think about."

Ford grinned affectionately. Owen had crawled between the silken sheets. His lids were leaden. Still his old animosities were strong within him.

"Besides," the scientist continued, "I haven't as much heart in it as I had. The Runds—hate to see them get it in the neck, the poor devils . . ."

Owen Wardell was asleep. Ford slipped quietly from the room.

**M**ORNING dawned clear and without a breeze, as did every morning under normal conditions on the dying planet. Owen already had left when Ford awakened. Dressing hurriedly, Ford stepped out on the balcony that faced the Square. His pulses quickened. He knew he would meet Nina, and somehow that early meeting each day was becoming a momentous occasion.

He had never thought a mere girl could set his pulses throbbing this way. None of those he had met on Earth had affected him like this. Confound it, he was falling in love!

Sitting by the usual embrasure, he saw her. A spot of vivid color in the drab surroundings and a figure of ineffable grace, she sat there with chin cupped in her hands looking out over the Square toward the platform which had been built for the space ship. The Martian sunrise made liquid fire of her red-gold hair.

"Nina!" he whispered.

She looked up at him with shining eyes.

"Ford!"

She moved aside, making room for him on the bench.

"You seem very happy this morning," he said.

"I am. To-morrow is the last day my people must suffer. On the day following it will rain."

"Oh!" Ford fell silent. That was depressing.

"Only think," she went on: "if Paul has not miscalculated, we shall have our canals well filled in forty days. The reservoirs, and all. There will be enough, he says, to restore normal conditions for more than a century. The reds and blues of the hills will return. New vegetation will spring up—everything will be as it was in ages past."

"You've never seen green fields, green hills?" Ford's gaze was far off in the heavens; his heart suddenly heavy.

"No! Green?" Nina was wide-eyed, incredulous.

"Yes, on Earth they are green. At least, they were, before this thing we call the red twilight. Now, if Paul and Owen fail—"

"Oh, Ford, I'm sorry!" Nina's soft fingers twined in his. "I believe I know how you feel— Like I do about my own land here. Only with me it is more real, the disaster we hope to avoid. It has been threatening so long. And now there is hope. You see, don't you?"

Ford could not answer. Their viewpoints diverged widely. He looked out into the emerald sky at the tiny pinpoint of light that was his own world. Visible still by reason of the rare atmosphere, it was unthinkably remote.

Helpless in the hands of the fate that hung now by so slender a thread.

For the first time since they left Earth he despaired, utterly.

## CHAPTER X.

### ZERO HOUR.

LATE the following night Ford paced the floor of Owen's room, awaiting news of the experiment. The final hour of the time allowed by his brother had arrived, and still there was no word from the workshop on the mesa. Ford had tried the radiophone in vain; the black cubes did not respond. In his heart he knew Owen had failed.

On the morrow rain would come again to Tiron. And on Earth the red twilight once more would take its toll. Day after day the thing would go on until—but his mind refused to picture the final death-struggle of humanity.

Nine and Carlotta had retired. They had been careful to avoid the subject that evening. Yet he well knew they rejoiced inwardly that the rains were to come within so very few hours. Rain was so sadly needed in the farm lands surrounding Thren-dis and in the almost empty canals and reservoirs of Tiron. Were Owen to discover a way out, the two would have acclaimed it gladly. But serious consideration of his own world was not in their thoughts. Knowing what he did of the past twenty years, he could scarcely blame them.

Yet Ford was a man of Earth. Though he never gave thought to the matter before the coming of the red twilight, he knew now that his own land meant more to him than life itself. Its peaceful valleys and majestic heights. The swift rivers; mirrorlike

lakes. Even the cities. Humankind, Weak and frivolous, but his own.

There had been moments of the past few days when, under the spell of Nina's eyes, he had been willing to forget—had forgotten. For the love of women much less desirable, strong men had overthrown kingdoms of Earth; sent thousands of their fellow men to their deaths. Might not he, and without censure, renounce his Earth ties and remain here? Win Nina as his own. Forget.

Resolutely Ford put Nina from his thoughts.

He tried to put himself in Paul's place, remembering him as the reckless youth of twenty years ago. Remembering, too, what he had seen here and what had been told him of the succeeding years.

Those rash adventurers had found Mars a dying planet, barren and arid, but peopled with friendly and lovable folk. Unable to leave, they had set about making homes for themselves and improving conditions for the natives.

They had taken apart the big rocket ship and used its mechanisms; the machine tools of its repair shop. They had contrived robots which they could control by radioed voice impulses. These were for the heavier and more dangerous tasks. The Runds assisted them in the more delicate work, proving themselves most willing and apt pupils in the knowledge and science of Earth. Square Horse rose up; and Thren-dis.

Many of Paul's companions had died. Here there was uncertainty and conflicting report. But Paul lived on, a mighty figure.

There was Carlotta Best, widowed and with an infant daughter. A fascinating and beautiful woman. These

two were the sole adults of their kind in the land. Mated by Rind law, they gradually forgot their former lives on Earth; transferred their allegiance to the adopted home. They were truly Martians.

At once they had found that water was scarce. The ancient pumps which supplied the canals and irrigating ditches drew less and less from the sub-surface sources on which the Rinds had relied for many generations. All were faced with extinction.

Deeply concerned, Rind leaders had consulted Bahspahl.

Paul then set about his experiments, and discovered a force that would disrupt the atoms, separating the protons and electrons of hydrogen and oxygen that comprised water. These subatomic energy charges could be reassembled, and the water restored. The force could be carried over a beam of ether vibrations.

Terrible as the effect of the rays had been on Earth, however, Ford had to admit that if he were in Paul's place he would have done the same. Nothing could have made him give up the plan.

**O**WEN returned, a haggard wreck of his former self. Paul was with him.

"You've failed!" Ford knew what the answer would be.

Paul nodded, while Owen flung his lean length across the bed. Not unkindly Paul said:

"It was too much to expect." He strolled to the window and looked vacantly into the Square. "We have attempted the impossible, Ford. To produce water, combining two atoms of hydrogen with one of oxygen is possible. A laboratory experiment, accompanied by an explosion, in which only a few droplets of the precious

liquid are formed. On the large scale we require—it's impossible! And my beam is of no avail except in the way it is used."

"The red twilight must come to Earth again?"

"To-morrow," Paul had not turned his head from the window. And Owen stretched there silent; he was incapable of speech.

Ford gulped. "Give it another trial, Paul!" he begged. "A few more days. There has to be a way!"

"I can't do it." His face was immovable as stone. "In the outlying provinces there is suffering even now. Several villages in the Zim-tar district have been abandoned. My Rinds, patient and trustful though they be, are complaining. A delegation visited me to-day. I can not explain to them."

"Paul!" Ford was desperate. "You owe these people nothing! They were doomed before you came. Come back with us in the space ship. Bring Carlotta and Nina. Destroy the rain machine before we leave. Let them work out their own salvation."

Owen had raised himself to sit cross-legged on the bed. He regarded his young friend with amazement, expecting an outburst from Paul.

But Paul was thoughtful now.

"I might persuade Carlotta," he answered, "but I'm afraid of Nina. She'd refuse, and if I tried force she'd lose herself in the diggings. Carlotta then would—well, both of them would be lost to me. There are other reasons."

And Nina would be lost to Ford. He groaned at the thought.

"Owen!" Ford asked, abandoning the first line of attack, "could you solve the water problem if you had more time?"

"There is a chance, of course." Owen was not hopeful.

"Paul—give him that chance!" Ford was grasping at straws. "You can hold off the Runds; they've waited all these years. What difference will a few days make to them? How great a difference to Earth—"

He was interrupted by the screeching of many voices in the Square. Loud cries of alarm rose suddenly; voices calling out to Bahspahl, to the gods of ancient Tiron.

"Look!" Paul shouted, drawing aside the curtain. "Your ship, Owen; there must be fire inside!"

The space ship, its fifty foot height of curved steel hull plate glowing red hot, swayed there on its platform in the Square. Excited Runds were rushing into the area from the side streets, swarming over the pavements so recently deserted, gathering in huddled groups to view with superstitious awe this amazing phenomenon.

With a choked cry Owen bounded to his feet and streaked from the room. Ford and Paul clattered down the broad stairs after him.

**N**O fire from within heated the hull of the space ship, but a blast of radiant energy from beneath. They saw its blue streamers crackling from the pavement underneath the platform.

Shrieking, the Runds fell back as the shell of the craft heated to dazzling whiteness.

Rooted to the spot, Ford watched, speechless, as the space ship collapsed and melted away. Little rivulets of its sparkling liquid metal spread over the pavement, sending forth tongues of blue-white flame in their wake.

Paul was struggling with Owen, dragging the maddened scientist out from the zone of danger. A section of the pavement sagged, and blobs of

flowing metal dripped through. The intense light died down and all that remained of the vessel in which Owen and Ford had spanned the heavens was a thickening mass of glowing fused material.

"Those devils from the underground—they've done this!" Owen babbled. "They've sent out a raiding party... We're trapped on Mars now! Doomed to remain—shut off from our own world—"

Paul was laughing, a hideous sound in the Martian night. A maniacal light was in his eyes. Shaking Owen, he was, thrusting forward his bearded jaw; yelling in the drawn white face of the other.

"Shut off, eh? I'll say you are! Like we were twenty years ago. You'll know now what it's like. You'll do as I did, Owen Wardell, and you'll come to the same conclusion. We'll see now, Owen, whether the welfare of Earth is more important than your own. Self-preservation, you know, is man's primal urge."

"Paul!" Ford laid a hand on his arm, wrenched free his grip on the shaken scientist.

The big man of Square House subsided. Then he had broken away from them; he was back there among the Runds, his great voice rolling out over the Square as he endeavored to quiet them. Telling them the danger was past; asking them to return to their homes. Promising rain for the morrow.

**A**WAKENED by the uproar outside, Nina and Carlotta had come out on the balcony of Square House. Ford saw the feral glitter in the older woman's eyes when she drew Paul aside, clinging to him in an agony of apprehension.

"Don't go down into the diggings!" she was moaning. "Paul, promise me you won't go down!"

A vivid memory of that metallic, ape-like figure clinging to the side of the radium pit flashed before Ford's eyes. He shivered.

"Ford!" Nina was at his side, more alluring than ever in the dim light from the Square. Her slim body unfolded in a shimmering negligee. "Please don't take it too hard. It is fate; a thing you must feel is for the best. Tiron welcomes you with open arms. You will be happy here."

Mechanically, Ford nodded. The awful significance of the calamity had not struck him in its full force yet. He was dazed.

But the wide eyes looked up at him, pitying and beseeching. The fragrance of her tumbled hair was in his nostrils. Swiftly he folded her in his arms, drew her close. Kissed her upturned, yielding lips. Lost himself in the wondering knowledge that his feeling for her was reciprocated. Time stood still.

A long while after, he gripped the balcony rail and stared off into the night. The others had gone in. Owen, his narrow shoulders drooping. Paul and Carlotta whispering, excited. Nina, suddenly abashed and self-conscious, had slipped from his arms and was away on twinkling feet.

He was alone, and the hideous truth smote him with staggering force. The breath-taking wonder of this love that had come to him was submerged in his thoughts of Earth. To-morrow the red twilight would return.

Never again to feast his eyes on the beauties of Earth's forests and fields. Never to battle the surf on a wind-whipped shore; to breathe in the salt tang of an ocean breeze. To be a part of the bustling life of Earth; to throw himself whole-heartedly into her whirlpool of social and business activity.

Yet Ford could not down the idea that somewhere there was still a solution. To save humanity now would mean an almost hopeless battle, but he would never give up.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



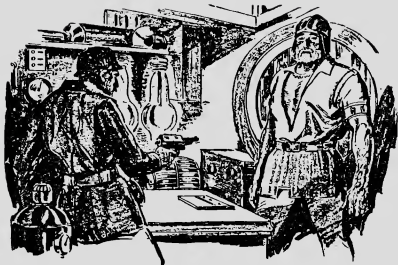
## Bulldog Vampires

AT an elevation of ten thousand feet in Peru vampire bats of great size and resembling bulldogs are numerous. The resemblance is because of the bat's undershot jaw, cropped ears, and broad muzzle. Its legs are well developed and heavy, enabling it move on the ground with the true bulldog waddle.

In the bulldog vampire the gullet is restricted and only fluid can enter the stomach. They are the terror of farmers because they attack late at night while most persons are asleep, their victims being cattle, horses, mules, and donkeys. They are particularly hard to see because their flight is low, and close to the earth.

Vampires of this type have teeth only fitted for incisions and none for grinding. For this reason they must find blood. Many stories of humans being attacked by vampires are rife in Peru. But none of them seem to be well authenticated.

Charles Adams.



"I am about to kill you, Paul"

## Red Twilight

*Fearsome creatures skulking in the underground caverns prey on the mind of Paul, ruler of Mars, and strengthen his determination to save his planet at the cost of humanity*

**By HARL VINCENT**

*Author of "Beyond the Dark Nebula," etc.*

### LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

**F**ORD MATTHEWS was in his office near Wall Street one morning, when the shrieks of his secretary called attention to a red film which was tinting the sun. Crowds were soon milling in the streets, as the sun sank in a terrifying red haze. Screams, shouts, moans rang up from the mob, where frightened humans crushed together in a panic.

Hurrying to the workshop of Owen Wardell, a brilliant physicist outlawed

for his advanced ideas, Ford was told that the red twilight was a ray from Mars—an offensive of the Martians. Though harmless to human beings, the rays were somehow disintegrating and sucking dry Earth's supply of water!

The Federal government refused to believe Wardell's explanation, however. Other scientists disagreed, too. Wardell could see only one possible salvation for Earth—he and Ford must set out for Mars in a space ship Owen

## RED TWILIGHT

had just completed. There was also a chance of finding Ford's brother, who had left for Mars a score of years earlier in a rocket with twenty others. Hope of finding Paul Matthews, in fact, had been Ford's reason for financing Owen's space ship experiment.

The space sphere proved a great success. Reaching Mars, they were guided by Neet, one of the friendly little Martians, to the palace of the ruler, Bahspahl. "Boss Paul" proved to be a great bearded Viking of a man, who admitted that he was Ford's brother, but flatly refused to shut off the deadly rays. Later they found that Paul had become a Martian at heart, willing to endanger the whole Earth for a million or two Martians, who would soon die off without a new water supply.

Paul's bodyguard consisted of two steel robots, grim and evil-looking giants with arms like massive steel cables. While Ford was alone with them, one suddenly seized him and hurled him into a black pit which had opened in the floor.

Death nearly overtook Ford then, as he swam through evil-smelling, grotesque caverns. He was guided to safety by the stepdaughter of Paul, a charming girl named Nina. How she happened to be in the passages she would offer no hint, and the mystery grew when she flew into mortal terror at sight of an apelike, metallic-looking creature clinging to the wall of a bubbling, glowing radium pit.

Meanwhile, Owen also got wind that a degenerate race of monsters was living in the "diggings" underground. He was convinced that Paul and his wife Carlotta and her daughter Nina lived in constant dread of these mysterious beings.

Reunited, Ford and Owen pleaded

with Paul to shut off the deadly rays, and succeeded in getting ten days' respite. Owen was to try and obtain water by some other process, but as the time neared a close he saw very little hope.

### CHAPTER XI.

#### RADIO DEFENSES.

WHILE Owen Wardell was desperately trying to find a new source of water for Mars, men on Earth lived in terror that the red twilight would again come to suck dry the lakes and rivers.

Dr. John Holden had been released from prison soon after the red twilight had lifted. He had obtained an appointment with the Director of Research and hurried to Washington.

"Do you believe this theory of the cosmic cloud?" he asked that individual earnestly.

"No, I don't." Peter Cullen dropped his voice to a whisper. "Between you and me, John, the astronomers don't believe it either. These bulletins have been given out only to pacify the people—to stave off the panic and rioting until a better solution is offered. Now it seems all danger is over."

"That's why they had me arrested, too, you can gamble. Thought I'd stir up a ruckus." John Holden grinned. "But you can get it out of your head, Peter, that the trouble is over."

"You have reason to believe it will happen again?"

"I certainly do."

"Why? It's not likely this weird natural phenomenon will repeat itself. Lightning seldom strikes twice in the same place."

"This is no phenomenon of nature, Peter." Holden's voice was confident.



"What is it, then?"

"The Martians are attacking us! No, wait—don't think you can laugh this off. I have measured radiations from Mars. They have some force they are using to rob us of our water, and they'll be back after more."

"John, you're crazy! You talk like Owen Wardell." Cullen leaned back in his chair, frowning. Holden was in his right mind and he had the air of a man thoroughly convinced and aroused, he saw.

"Perhaps I do sound like Wardell," the astronomer returned, "but I'm not crazy. It is of Wardell I wish to speak. I had him on the visiphone, told him of my discovery of the rays. He knew all about them. He was in a vile temper; hurried out of the room and left me staring and jabbering at my own instrument. Said he was leaving at once."

"Leaving for where?"

"He didn't say. But later it was said up there in the Ramopos, where he used to hide out, that the dome of his laboratory went sailing away into the heavens and was lost in the red twilight. Half scared to death, some of the natives were—more by that than by the menace of the skies."

"H'm!" Peter Cullen sat erect, unsmiling now. "You think he perfected that space ship of his and started for Mars?"

"Yes. The dome-shaped thing did not return."

"That is something. What do you advise me to do?"

"Get a search warrant or some writ for our protection, Peter. Let's go out there and see if we can find out what he's been up to. What do you say?" John Holden sat on the edge of his chair, ready and waiting. He saw he had struck a responsive chord.

"Just the thing! We'll go over in a government plane at once. Be with you in a minute." Peter Cullen turned to his visiphone and gave some commands.

OUTWARDLY the world was returning to normal, taking stock of its losses, in spite of the dread that lay beneath. The damage had not been fatal. True, crops had suffered greatly, and the pessimists were predicting famine, but surplus stores in the granaries of several countries could be distributed. The world would manage somehow.

Rain had fallen in many sections. The streams would again fill up, and the inland seas and lakes. There had been a slight recession of the tides. But the oceans were vast; the small proportion of Earth's water which had gone would not be missed.

Of graver concern was the matter of the riotings. Many had lost their lives in the great panic. It was disheartening that thinking people, educated and of courageous nature, could revert to such savagery.

Then came an announcement that startled the world anew. The red twilight might return! Two American scientists, Dr. Holden of Swarthmore and Peter Cullen of the United States Science Research, declared that the close approach of the planet Mars was responsible. It was their belief that living beings of that arid world were deliberately setting about to rob the world of its water. This being the case, they would not stop at what already had been done.

The newscasts blared forth more tidings. Measures were being taken to combat the red twilight if it should reappear. The newscasters would cooperate with the governments of the

world. The energy used by the Martians in their thievery was a wave motion in the ether, somewhat like the radio impulses of the visiphone transmitters. All radio stations of the world-wide system stood ready to direct their power into the proper channels, and charge Earth's atmosphere with neutralizing vibrations which would form a screen to ward off the Martian rays.

Mankind was thus to be prepared in the event of future attacks. It was as simple as that.

The scientific world was agog over the news. As usual, dissenting opinions were many. That Mars was inhabited with intelligent beings was, of course, ridiculous. But the evidence of the projected energy was convincing. Probably the result of magnetic disturbances within the planet, many of them held. And a multitude of schemes were proposed as alternatives to the plans of Cullen and Holden. All of which was to be expected.

But to the average man it was an understandable thing. Quite readily he believed in the existence of these Martians. They were something he could visualize; not an abstract scientific conception. That they should be robbing Earth to fill their empty canals was, to him, a logical procedure. In their place, he would do the same. And this idea of Earthmen pitting their might and wits against them was one that fired his imagination. It was to be a war of the worlds; not a terrifying act of God. Strife was a thing he understood and gloried in. Of course Earth was unconquerable!

The work went forward rapidly. Cargo ships of the air lanes were pressed into service, to rush speedily assembled apparatus to the great transmitters of the visiphone system. Huge

armies of workmen were drafted. Engineers; physicists. Factories in all corners of the globe worked overtime on the production of the needed materials. Earth was not to be caught unprepared.

**I**N Washington a group of men sat anxiously waiting. These were the men who had planned the defense against the expected attack from the heavens. Cullen, Holden, Brinsmade of the Signal Corps, Secretary of War Stephens, and officers of the General Staff.

Preparations both here and abroad were completed. The world awaited the coming of the red twilight with something of anticipation. It would be a signal victory for the superior intelligence and canny foresight of mankind when this move of the Martians was frustrated. Earth's civilization would have demonstrated its supremacy in the known universe. So sure was he, the average man.

But these men in Washington were not so certain. John Holden found himself wishing fervently that Owen Wardell was with them. He dreaded the possibility of failure. He could not help thinking of the ridicule it would bring.

Others in the group doubted that the red twilight would come again. It was too fantastic, this theory. Yet many careful investigators had confirmed Holden and Cullen.

"Gentlemen!" John Holden cleared his throat. "It may be that there will be no recurrence of the red twilight, as some of you have suggested. What then? We shall be the laughing-stock of the world."

"What of it?" Secretary Stephens growled. "At least we shall not be caught napping. Let 'em laugh."

"Cold feet, Holden?" Peter Cullen spoke up.

A general laugh greeted the sally. They knew that John was worried, but Cullen was not so easy in mind himself. Nor any of them. That laugh served to relieve the tension.

Suddenly Holden's face paled. He pointed a shaking forefinger.

"It's here, gentlemen!" he said huskily. "See for yourselves!"

With one accord they rushed to the windows. The midday sun had dimmed to half its normal brilliance. It was red now, the color of blood. The crimson haze closed in over Washington.

Abruptly and with startling clarity the visiphone spoke:

"Newscasts signing off for transfer of energy to the defenses. Operation will be resumed immediately the red twilight has left."

A click; then breathless silence in the secretary's office.

ON a street corner in a small village near Tuxedo, New York, a crowd was arguing. One of the men, Cliff Harper by name, spat vehemently into a puddle left in the street by the heavy rain of the night before.

"I'm tellin' you," he averred, "I saw it. I saw this dome thing go flyin' off Wardell's roof and sailin' away in the red sky. And nobody can tell me different."

"Rats! That was one of Ed Collins's applejack jugs you seen."

The crowd laughed and Cliff aimed a hasty punch at the speaker's midsection. Missed.

"You're a liar, Tom!" he roared. "I ain't had a drink in a month, and you know it . . . Tell you somethin' else." He lowered his voice confidentially. "There's been a bunch of sol-

diers around Wardell's place lately. And some fellows with spyglasses and things—measurin'."

At that instant the red twilight swept down. There was awed quiet save for the voice of the newscaster from the machine in the store across the street. Signing off.

"Christopher!" a hollow voice exclaimed. "It's here, like they said!"

"Now you watch" Cliff Harper was bragging. "It'll last about ten minutes—mebbe less. These engineer fellows know what they're talkin' about. And I'll make a bet with any of you they got some of their dope up to Wardell's place."

"Aw, shut up!" some one exclaimed with irritation. "You talk all the time, Cliff."

Necks straining, they peered into the ruddy sky. Moanings and whisperings came from far up there, as if a cyclone raged miles above them. A prickly sensation crept over their bodies, and their hair stood on end. Mighty forces were battling for supremacy out there in the heavens. Their breath came in short gasps as the air grew dense and highly charged with electricity.

A dog ran howling down the street.

The long-drawn whistle of a locomotive over on the main line of the Erie brought a shriek of terror from a small boy who had been listening in open-mouthed curiosity. He streaked for home as fast as his chubby legs could carry him.

"See that!" Cliff Harper gloated. "We're lickin' 'em! Didn't I tell you?"

The skies were clearing and the sun shone forth once more with its natural light. Things about them took on their familiar colors. A great cheer rose up from the crowd.

And then the ground trembled beneath their feet. A jagged streak of

crimson light flung itself from the heavens earthward. Thunderous roarings from the mountains. Wild despairing cries from all over the village. Women running past, hugging their babies to their breasts; other children, older, clinging to their flying skirts.

"You mean they've licked us, Cliff Harper!" a voice quavered. "Look at that puddle!"

The puddle at the curb had been fully three feet across not five minutes before. Now you could have spanned it with a two-foot rule. As Cliff Harper watched, it shrank swiftly to the size of a pie tin. Then it was gone, and the pavement was dry—mud-caked. It was very dark now; the awful red gloom the Martians had sent.

Turning swiftly, Cliff Harper saw that he was alone. The others had fled he knew not where. The village was deserted.

Stumbling through the red twilight, sobbing and cursing, he made for the hills. The engineer fellows had failed.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MAN OF IRON.

FORD MATTHEWS courted sleep diligently that night the space ship was destroyed. But it was no use. Dressing finally, he prowled around in the rooms he and Owen occupied. The scientist was like a dead man, sleeping so soundly in his exhaustion that Square House might have burned to the ground without awakening him.

With the first faint light of dawn Ford was out on the balcony. In a few hours Nina would be here to meet him. His heart leaped at remembrance of her surrender. The fragrance of her hair; the long lashes dewy on her cheeks. Words of endearment.

To-day the rains would come to Tiron. On Earth there would be the red twilight; death stalking. It was a monstrous dilemma Ford faced.

Thus far there had been nothing he could do. Owen wouldn't let him help. With his untrained mind and clumsy fingers he would only be in the way. The clever Rund mechanics were more suitable assistants. Yet Owen had failed in his efforts.

In some way Earth must be protected. A slim possibility entered Ford's mind then, took root. If only he might steal out there in the dead of night to the rain machine! Wreck the delicate controls, as much of the machinery as he could. Months, as time is reckoned on Earth, perhaps a year, would be required to rebuild them. Meanwhile Owen would have his chance.

There would be suffering amongst the Runds, he knew. Lives lost, even. But here they could manage somehow, while on Earth . . .

Heavy steps resounded in the plaza, clanking. Ford leaned out over the rail and gasped at what he saw. One of the huge robots was striding swiftly across the Square. Straddling its broad shoulders was Paul, his voice-control strapped to his chest. Not waiting for daylight, he was starting for the mesa, to supervise the ray projection. There was a snap and vigor to Paul's movements. He looked the part of a Martian warrior.

Ford dashed into the library of their suite, opening the portable visiphone. At least he would know how things were going on Earth. How the second coming of the red horror would affect them.

Tuning in on the news center at Washington he heard the time gong that signalled high noon. The days of

Mars and Earth had almost coincided when they first came. Now, due to the differing rates of rotation and the changed relative positions of the planets, there was a shifting of several hours.

An acute wave of nostalgia gripped him at the faint words of the announcer, "Twelve o'clock noon, Eastern Standard Time." Never more to be a dweller in that world, never to set foot on its soil! It was heart-rending.

"Our patrons are advised," the announcer went on, "that everything is ready. The transmitters of the visiphone system are prepared to divert their vast energies into the heaviside layer of the atmosphere. Of course we do not know when the Martians will renew their attack, if ever. But the world is prepared to fight off this red twilight—"

What was this? They knew back there at home? And were ready to do battle. Ford thrilled with the wonder of it.

"Cullen and Holden," the eerie voice continued, "deserve all credit for the undertaking. It was Holden who discovered the emanations from Mars; Cullen who set the machinery of government in motion—"

**E**NOUGH! Ford waited to hear no more. He dashed madly to Owen's bed; was shaking his friend vigorously.

"Owen! Get up!" he shouted excitedly. "News from Earth! They're ready to fight the red twilight!"

Heavy-lidded, his head wobbling as Ford jerked him upright, Owen stared unbelieving. Then he was on his feet, energetically babbling his amazement as he climbed into his clothes.

"What! You say they have found out?"

"Holden and Cullen have doped it out. They're charging the heaviside layer, or something, to insulate them from Paul's energy beam."

Owen gaped. "Holden! Got more sense than I gave him credit for. Stealing my thunder, by George!"

"Will it work, Owen?" Ford was trembling with excitement.

"How do I know? Sounds like a reasonable procedure."

The eerie voice from the ether echoed faintly in the room adjoining. With his clothes only half on, Owen dashed into the library.

"The visiphone system will, of necessity, shut down when the time comes. All of Earth's radio energy is to be concentrated on the radiators of the defensive force. Neutralizing vibrations are to be used, and the public is warned that the skies may give forth screaming sounds when the opposing forces are in conflict. This, however, is to be no cause for alarm."

"Listen to that!" Owen cried. "They've developed some sense in the past few days. Wish I was there now!"

He fell silent as the newscaster paused.

"Paul's gone out to the mesa," Ford told him.

"Already! I knew it would be early."

"Newscasts signing off for transfer of energy," the voice of the other concluded sharply.

Ford and Owen rushed to the balcony. It was dark out there, and rain was falling. Gently at first; a warm, steaming shower. Then it came in torrents, like a clondburst. Runds streamed into the Square shouting, cavorting gleefully.

"No good, their defense," Ford groaned.

## RED TWILIGHT

"Wait—there's a time lag," Owen's knuckles showed white from his grip on the balcony rail.

The rain was easing off; coming now in fitful spurts. There was a rumble in the heavens as of the elements protesting. Then, with startling abruptness, the skies cleared. The sun shone forth weakly, casting the long shadows of early morning in the Square. The Runds out there ceased their demonstrations.

"They've won!" Owen breathed delightedly. "I'd like to hand John Holden a medal for this—even though he did beat me to it."

Ford was jubilant. The people of Earth had triumphed. Civilization there would continue its steady march. Though he was no longer a part of it, he gloated in its victory.

And here in Tiron there was work to be done. Owen would solve the problem, Ford was confident. He and Paul would find some way of providing for the great need of the parched planet. They'd have to! And there was Nina. With her he would be content to remain. There would be a few regrets, of course, longings for the old life. But—

The skies were darkening once more. A throbbing of vast power convulsed Tiron; steadied to a smooth vibration like the purring of an enormous motor somewhere in its vitals. And the rain began to fall in endless downpour. Rund voices arose anew in glad acclaim.

"He's increased the power!" Owen gasped. "They've lost, Ford, our scientists of Earth! Met their Waterloo once and for all time!"

"Where you going?" Ford yelled.

Owen had ducked through the doorway and was racing across to the corridor.

"Out to the mesa!" he flung back. "Getting to work. And I'll lick this thing if it kills me. I'll be staying out there, Ford. It can't be done—but I've got to do it! God help us all!"

He was gone and Ford dropped weakly into a chair. Paul would permit the continuance of the experiments, he knew. Probably would help. But the rain machine would go on with its horrible work in the meantime. Owen might succeed eventually—but too late.

**M**ISERABLY the day passed. Nina strove mightily to console Ford, but a barrier had risen between them.

Through endless hours the rain fell. Occasionally there would be a slackening; renewed tremblings of Tiron's crust that gave evidence of battlings with Earth's defenses. Always that devilish machine of Paul's was successful in battering down the resistance. Always the rain returned with freshened vigor. It was hopeless, that brave effort of mankind.

Evening came at last and the downpour ceased. Ford retired to his room; made haste to operate the visiphone. A little later he rejoined Nina and Carlotta, white and shaken. He knew it had been a terrible day on Earth. They were facing the thing courageously now, his own people; planning to strengthen the defense in every way possible. All generation of power was to be diverted to the charging of the atmosphere. But this meant that new and more powerful oscillators must be constructed; new radiating antennæ. Much time would be needed. And the tides were receding at an alarming rate.

Paul returned to Square House alone. Ford well knew that Owen would not

leave that workshop now while there was still hope.

His brother's sandy beard bristled with determination.

"Ford," he said grimly, when he entered, "I want to have a talk with you in private."

"Very well." Ford was sullen, resentful. It was a pity this big hulk of a man had no more human feeling in his make-up.

In the library of his and Owen's quarters, Ford faced his brother.

"I know what's in your mind," Paul said, his eyes watchful, "and I'm warning you to keep hands off. You'd do anything to stop this thing I'm doing, wouldn't you now?"

"Almost anything, Paul." He eyed the other speculatively. "But wait," hopefully turning to the visiphone, "I'd like you to listen to the newscasts. They—"

"Huh! Trying to arouse my sympathies again. It's no go, boy. The projector will operate every day."

"But, Paul—"

"No buts. Hear me now. Owen is at liberty to go on with his research, and I shall help. But I'll tell you in advance it's an impossible thing he's attempting. And the defenses of Earth—Owen told me about them—are useless. They haven't enough generating capacity in the entire globe to combat my energy. It's just too bad for them. I'm sorry and wish it could be otherwise. But we have ourselves to consider. We've got to have this water here! We *shall* have it!"

"Paul, if you'd only wait!"

"Impossible. I've waited too long already. And here is the warning I'm giving you: if you attempt to interfere I shall be compelled to take away your liberty until the thing is done; imprison you in a cell in the diggings."

"You wouldn't!"

"Try me and see." Paul's gaze was merciless. "Further than this," he grated, "I want you to know that the projector itself has been made impregnable. You'd wreck it if you could; I see it in your eyes. Don't try it, Ford; it would be a waste of energy. There is but one entrance out there, as you know; the tunnel mouth at the base of the cliff. This now is guarded by two of my robots who are under constant radio control of a trusted Rund. There are orders to crush and maim any living being attempting to pass, excepting only myself. The starting mechanism of the projector which, as you know, is voice-operated, has been altered. Only I know the combination of sound impulses that will start or stop it. I can do it from here or in the plant, as I choose. The thing is locked; foolproof. Don't try and be a fool, Ford. That is all."

"All!" Ford raged impotently when Paul left him.

The Boss of Square House was taking no chances.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### DESPERATION.

**F**OUR days dragged by. Dreary, horror-filled days for Ford; with nights of tossing insomnia. He was helpless, and without hope.

Steadily the rain fell on Tiron by day. By night there were the voices and image-flashes of the visiphone, telling the horrible tale of mankind's last stand. Earth was making a gallant fight in the face of overwhelming odds. There were no fear-crazed riotings now, only the grim determination to conquer this searing energy from out the heavens. To outwit the Martians

if humanly possible: to die fighting valiantly, if die they must.

It was a one-sided affair, this war of the planets. A hopeless one for Earth's defenders. With the combatants separated by millions of miles, it was awe-inspiring in its swiftness.

Already the canals and reservoirs of Tiron were filling rapidly. The beds of ancient seas, dry for many centuries, were wetted; widening pools showed at the bottoms, and newly-formed streams emptied into their depths.

On Earth the situation became more serious daily. The coastlines of the continents advanced steadily. A hasty calculation of the Meteorological Service on the fourth day showed a lowering of more than one hundred feet in the Atlantic Ocean. Long Island Sound had well nigh disappeared.

Time and again Ford deserted the visiphone, sick at heart, seeking the companionship of Nina. Distractingly lovely she was, swaying toward him in the one moment; that barrier of which they dared not speak rising up between them in the next.

He had not seen Paul since the night the big man had warned him. Nor Owen. The black cube of the radiophone connecting with the mesa was unresponsive. Paul had made certain he would not be pestered.

Ford chafed with the suspense. It was maddening, this realization of his own uselessness. The inactivity was wearing his nerves ragged. If only Owen had permitted him to help in the experiments, he was sure he could have borne it better.

O WEN returned that night. Hardly able to stand, and with great dark circles beneath his eyes, he flung himself on his bed without bothering to remove his clothing.

"All in, Owen?" Ford looked down on him, deeply concerned.

"All in—yes! I'm beaten." The scientist turned his head, looking away.

"You mean the thing is impossible?"

"Utterly. I've encountered a blank wall; it's insurmountable. I'm finished, Ford."

There was silence for many minutes; silence fraught with pain.

"It's hideous, Owen!" Ford whispered then. "The brave fight they are making at home. Pitiful. They—"

"Don't tell me. I can imagine only too well."

"There's no hope at all?" Ford's tongue clung to his palate on the words. It was as if the horror of the thing paralyzed his senses. His brain was numb with thinking of it.

"None! I tried again to persuade your brother to give me more time. He refused. He knows I have been chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. Do you know, I am convinced that his determination has something to do with those monsters in the diggings. He acts so secretive! I keep thinking of how he acted when the lights went out the other night at dinner. Ford, those creatures in the radium pits have a tremendous power over your brother!"

Ford had already felt that Paul's secret was what drove him relentlessly on and on.

"But what can we do?" he asked. "We can't learn anything about it. I've searched the cellars of Square House, and can find no trace of the entrance. I'd like to get my hands on whoever burned the space ship. Remember how tight-mouthed he was about that?"

"As he is about everything connected with the diggings," Wardell said wearily. "There's nothing we can do now."



Ford cogitated darkly. Why was Nina so reticent in the matter? Perhaps she was afraid of Paul. Or perhaps she didn't trust the man to whom she had given assurance of her love.

"Leave me now, will you, old man?" Wardell was saying.

Poor Owen! He was on the verge of a complete breakdown. Being alone was the best medicine he could have. Ford returned to his own room and composed himself for sleep.

FOR a long time he lay half dozing, his mind a riot of conflicting emotions. He must have slept for a few minutes. Suddenly every sense was keenly alert. He sat erect, staring in the darkness; his body in a cold sweat.

A horrible thought had come to him in that short sleep. There was a way out! Paul had told him that the projector could be started by no voice but his own. The projector was shut down. If Paul's voice were to be stilled forever, the deadly rays could never send destruction to Earth again.

Grimly he put the thought from his mind; courted sleep with desperate endeavor. But the thought persisted. To save the Earth he must slay his own brother this very night. It was the only way. Paul, whom he had almost worshiped as a boy, must give up his life that millions of his kind might live on Earth. And Ford's hand was to take that life.

He was on his feet then, dressing. His mind was curiously clear. It was not his brother he was to slay, but the destroyer of mankind. Whatever the faults of humanity, no man had the right to seal its doom—Paul Matthews no more than any other.

His pistol had been lost in the rank waters below. He would creep into Owen's room and get his. Likely Owen

was sleeping peacefully. Ford hoped so; he dared not tell his friend of the thing he was to do. It was a matter between himself and God. Besides, Owen would be sure to interfere. And Ford must not fail.

Owen Wardell was not in his bed. Too exhausted to sleep, probably, he had gone for a walk in the Square. Ford found the automatic and saw with satisfaction that it held a fully loaded clip.

A light was in Paul's and Carlotta's suite. He heard Carlotta's mellow voice; she was humming softly to herself. Paul was not there. He must be working late in one of the laboratories of Square House, as he often did. In the one below the street floor probably.

As he reached the bottom of the stairs, Ford saw a light shining through the open door of the cellar laboratory. He looked in, the pistol tightly gripped in fingers that trembled not at all.

Paul was holding to the light a test-tube partly filled with a colorless liquid from which yellow vapors curled. Unwarned and unsuspecting.

It was odd, Ford thought, that no twinges of conscience assailed him now. He had no feeling at all. He knew he would press the trigger without a qualm. Once. Twice, perhaps; and the man who had kept on in this destruction of humankind would be forever silent. The rain machine on the mesa would never hum again.

It would be the end of things for Ford. He realized that, but the thought left him without emotion. He would give himself over to the Runds; their justice would be swift and merciless. Unless Carlotta got to him first. She was a woman fully capable of avenging her lord. Nina—her face rose before him, giving him momentary pause—he

would see no more. For him, life was over. But Earth would remain. Humanity would suffer no more in the red twilight.

"PAUL!"

Ford stepped into the laboratory. His brother whirled to face him. Ford drew a bead on the broad chest, and the muzzle of the automatic was as steady as if held in a vise.

"You here!"

Paul Matthews was calm in the face of death.

"Drop that test-tube!" Ford commanded. It contained acid; he wanted no swiftly flung burning liquid to spoil his aim. But he could not shoot this man, any man, unwarned.

Paul let the vial slip from his fingers. It tinkled, crashing on the concrete floor. A deafening sound, it seemed to Ford's ears.

"I am about to kill you, Paul," his lips were saying. "I've given you every chance. Pleaded with you. But you would not listen to reason. This is the only way to put a stop to this madness of yours. Now!"

His finger trembled on the trigger.

"Shoot, if you think you must!" Paul said, and his eyes were unafraid.

There was a moment of charged silence. The pistol clattered to the floor and Ford stood shivering, overcome by the horror of the thing he had almost done.

"I knew you couldn't." Paul was at his side, supporting him. Ford's knees had weakened. "You're too white—too kind-hearted." Not a word of censure.

And then a muffled scream rang out somewhere in the caverns underneath. Ford's knees straightened; his entire body tensed. The scream was repeated.

"Nina!" he shouted. "She's down in the pits!"

AT once Paul went into action. Flinging Ford aside, he was out of the room in a single bound, racing along the dim-lit corridor.

Ford was after him in a flash, calling to Nina.

"Stay back!" Paul yelled from the gloom. "Back, I say! I'll tend to this."

Not much! Not if Ford could catch him. He ran, crazed with fear for Nina's safety. In that instant he knew she was more to him than anything else. More than the red twilight. More than all mankind. If anything happened to her . . .

Paul crouched panting where a panel in the wall was sliding back.

"Keep away!" he snarled.

"No, it's Nina, man! I love her—know that? And I'm going down there with you."

"Ford—I've told you—you can't!"

They were struggling together then at the narrow opening that was widening ever so slowly. Ford ducked out from underneath the huge encircling arms of his brother. They could crush the life out of a man, those arms.

"You can't stop me!"

The opening through the wall was wide enough now, and in a moment Paul would have slipped through. There was but one thing to do, and Ford did it. Paul was the larger and stronger. But he was older; slower on his feet. Ford lashed out with his right and caught his brother a staggering blow under the chin. The proud head snapped back and Paul went down, slithering to the bottom of the steps.

In the twinkling of an eye Ford was inside and the panel had slid back. He was in utter darkness.

"Paul," he whispered, creeping down the steps, "didn't knock you out, did I?"

"Damn 'near"—grumpily from the blackness. "You pack a wallop, I'll say. We'll settle that another time. Now we must find Nina."

He was fumbling with something and suddenly there was a light. A long passageway stretched there before them.

"Come ahead," Paul grunted, starting off on a loping run. "You're in for it now. Look sharp!"

Their swift footsteps echoed hollowly in the downward sloping tunnel.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### THE PIT MONSTERS.

"NINA!" Ford sang out, suddenly frantic with alarm.

"Hush!" whispered Paul.

"Not a sound now. *They* may be near."

The two had left the lighted passage and were crawling on hands and knees through a crevice where the green phosphorescence glowed eerily.

"What is this mystery down here?" Ford demanded in a harsh whisper.

No reply from the big man who wriggled his way along just ahead.

"Paul! Answer me. Who are they, these beings you fear?"

"Shut up. I told you I'd never tell. What you may see now I can't help. But don't ask questions. You'll have to guess what you wish."

Stubborn as ever. And Ford's guess might be more dangerous than the truth. What was this awful thing his brother was hiding?

A low sobbing moan reached their ears. From directly underneath, it seemed.

"It's Nina!" Paul breathed.

Before them was a flickering radiance. One of the radium pits. Ford held his breath as Paul crawled out along a narrow shelf that was barely wide enough for his body.

And then they saw Nina. She had slipped from this very ledge and hung there dangling over the bubbling horror of the pit bottom, one white arm twisted with an agony of clutching between two projections of the ledge. Even now her grip was failing. How Paul had known where to search for her in this maze of underground passages and caverns was beyond Ford's comprehension.

"Hold on, Nina," Paul directed. "One moment more and we'll have you."

"Thank God!" The soft voice ended in a sob. Nina was fast giving out.

"Grab my legs, Ford." Paul wormed himself farther along the tiny ledge of slimy stone. "Wedge yourself if you can."

Grunting with the strain, Ford clung to Paul's knees as the other moved outward. He saw those powerful arms locked under the girl's. She swung free then, out over the swirling mass of blue-green flame and boiling liquid a hundred feet below. Her head hung loosely over her shoulder. Ford braced himself in the tunnel mouth as the enormous weight of the two swayed there, almost pulling his arms from their sockets.

**I**NCH by inch he drew them in. Now Paul's chest found support on the crumbling ledge and the strain lessened. A loosened stone went hurtling into the awful depths, caroming from the rough side of the pit below and glowing with sudden green light as it fell.

Together, they lifted the limp form of Nina to the ledge; then moved her into the crevasse through which they had come. Panting from their exertions, they lay there talking. Nina was unconscious.

"Have to wait until she recovers, Paul. We'd never get her through this passage as she is."

Then he shrank back into the crevasse. A ghastly shriek rang through the pit. Another and another. Paul groaned and Nina stirred uneasily.

"Here, let me through!" Paul was shoving past him, thrusting his huge bulk out there before him. "This isn't for your eyes, Ford."

But Ford saw. Two of the metallic ape-creatures were scrambling along the ledge. Many of them; he counted seven. Raucous cries of hate came from their grinning, yellow-fanged mouths. The gruesome hollows where eyes should have been glowed with emerald fire in the awful glare from the pit. One of them carried a shining cylindrical object in its claw-like forepaws. The hands of a shriveled old man they were like, only crusted with iridescent metal.

"Drop it!" Paul yelled.

Ford saw the ghastly creature fling it directly toward them instead. He ducked instinctively. But Paul stood firm, caught the fiendish bomb, and flung it away from them, his scorched hands sizzling from that half-second's contact. In mid-air, the bomb burst—a terrific explosion and a brilliant flash. Paul was knocked to his knees. A second later the ledge was torn away and flung into the depths. Ford saw the misshapen ape-creatures, engulfed by the explosion of their own devilish contrivance, follow the debris. Reverberations of the crash deafened him. And then there was a huge spouting

flame below. Spattering the pit wall with liquid fire, dripping green; leaving spots that glowed.

"Ford!" Nina moaned. "You saw them? How many were there?"

"Seven."

"All were destroyed?"

"All." Ford's hand trembled when it closed over her fingers. She was sobbing, wild-eyed. A wonder she had not lost her mind when she recovered from her swoon to view this awful thing of the pit.

Paul was groaning, dragging himself painfully into the crevasse. His left arm dangled limp, shattered. His shirt was blood-soaked. And there was an ugly hollow there; his deep chest was crushed.

"Man, you're wounded!" Ford gasped. "Badly, too."

"I know. I can manage. We must get back."

"Sure you can make it?"

"Sure. Carry on." Paul Matthews essayed a cheerful laugh. It ended in a rattling cough; bloody foam was at his lips.

Nina wept softly as she wormed her way through ahead of them.

LONG and tortuous was the way back through the winding crevasse. Wheezing and coughing horribly, Paul was forced to rest at frequent intervals. Ford and Nina waited, each time, in palpitating silence.

Ford's heart was heavy within him. Paul was a dead man, he feared. Only his marvelous vitality was keeping him going. With that frightful wound and with evidence of internal injury, it would be a miracle if he recovered. And not a half hour before, Ford had been on the point of slaying him.

They came out into one of the lighted passages. Paul's legs would

not carry his own great weight, and Nina and Ford supported him on either side. When they came to the sloping tunnel, Ford was half carrying him.

Paul was babbling incoherently, his voice a weak whisper. "Every one of them—dead—gone . . . The pit gurgled—did you hear?—gurgled . . . Nina, Nina!"

"Yes, Paul—here!" The girl's voice broke.

"Ford saw, girl. Promise—you won't tell—he must not know . . ."

"I promise." Nina clapped her free hand to her mouth, her eyes horror-filled.

And then Paul Matthews went limp. The great weight of him fell on Ford and he staggered under it. Shifted it so that Paul draped dangling over his shoulders. Reeled stumbling toward the short stairs.

"I've killed him!" Nina moaned. "It's my fault—mine! He forbade me to come down and I disobeyed him. I'll never forgive myself—never."

The panel was open then and voices babbled excitedly. Quin was there, and Misor; all the Rund servants. Carlotta; whimpering, panicky.

Borne on hands that were gentle, the master of Square House was moved to his own bed. He still breathed faintly.

"A physician?" Ford commanded. "Is any available?"

"Yes—Yoril, the best in Thren-dis. I'll get him." Nina was gone, on flying feet.

"Will he die?" Carlotta had composed herself somewhat, but the great eyes were stricken; dull. The feral look had gone.

"I hope not."

The woman knelt beside the bed where Paul lay faintly groaning.

Servants were everywhere in the room, talking in frightened whispers. Fluttering, wanting to be of assistance, but annoying.

"Out of here, all of you!" Ford told them.

He and Carlotta were alone then, looking down on the still form of the man they both loved. Paul moaned once, rolled his head.

"Gone!" he babbled in delirium. "All gone. My work done—"

He was quiet again, his breathing almost imperceptible.

"The beasts of the pits?" Carlotta whispered. "He means those?"

"Yes. Seven of them—killed by their own violence."

"Thank God! Oh, thank—"

Yoril was there, a keen little Rund. Shooing them from the bed-side. A swift examination; a grunt of astonishment. Nina watching.

"Lady Carlotta, you leave." He whirled on them, a human dynamo. "Nina stay. Good nurse, Nina. And the man stay. I operate on Bahspahl. He live."

**A**N hour later, sick and trembling, Ford was in his own room. Quin hovered near, solicitous. It had been a nightmare, that operation. The swift, strong fingers of the Rund surgeon cutting, exploring. The clapping severed blood vessels. Suturing of nerves. The repair of the torn pleura. Wiring of fractured bones. The skin grafts, and the meticulous stitching over all. But Paul would live!

Nina was still in the sick room—an angel of mercy. Calm and efficient. No wonder the Runds loved her. Every one loved Nina.

The red twilight was a dim memory; unimportant, somehow.

He thought of the beasts of the pits. Vile, reeking creatures. But strangely, horribly, resembling humans—seared and plated by the mysterious fires of a Martian Hades. Shriveled beyond recognition.

Quin hurried into the room.

"Bahsowen call you!" he panted. "At cube in rear sun room. Cube that talks from rain machine. You hurry, Bahsford?"

"Yes." Ford was after him, running. What had Owen done out there on the mesa?

"Owen!"—breathlessly into the face of the cube. "What is it?"

"I dreamed it, Ford; it came to me in my sleep. The secret of the water. I've got it at last!" Owen could scarcely talk, he was so excited. "Listen: it's the energy of Paul's projector, directed on the sands of the desert instead of toward Earth. Atoms are disrupted in huge quantity; electrons fly off. Paul never was able to reassemble them to produce water unless the original molecules were of the same substance. But I've done it—finally—reassociated protons and electrons in their proper relation. Pure, sparkling  $H_2O$  is the result. Vast quantities of it bubbling in the drylands! He didn't think I knew the voice-control impulses, but I overheard."

"Owen! I knew you could do it!"

"Now it is finished, the red twilight." Owen was jubilant, exulting. "And I've got the laugh on Paul Matthews. Wait until he hears it!"

At the words Ford sobered. "Come back home, Owen. Paul has been seriously injured."

"No! I'll be there right away." Owen's voice trailed off into the silence of the night.

Ford returned to his room, and sat there musing. What had he said to

Owen? "Come back home." And truly this was to be their home. There would be Nina. Paul, when he was well, would be himself once more. The menace of the diggings was removed. Owen, too, good old Owen! He could be happy here along with the rest.

The sights and sounds of Earth would be lost to them. But there would be new interests; the marvelous regeneration of a dying world to glory in as it progressed. They would have to forget their yearnings for Earth, become Martians.

The life of Earth was to go on, little changed excepting in the increased territory man had acquired by the recession of the tides. More room for his expansion and growth now, he too would find new interests, new problems.

And there was always the visiphone. They were not utterly cut off here on Mars . . .

Ford Matthews dozed off in his chair.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE LAST EARTHMEN.

PAUL was resting comfortably, they told Ford next morning.

Trained Rund nurses had been summoned by Yoril, who had insisted that Nina retire for a well earned sleep.

Ford awakened Owen with the news. For a long time he sat on the scientist's bed, discussing with him the occurrences of the previous night.

Quin interrupted them. "Lady Carlotta to see Bahsford," he said with all the solemnity of a hutler of Earth announcing a titled guest.

"Got 'em both on the run, eh?" Owen said dryly.

Ford laughed; his spirits were high this morning.

"I'll get even with you for that!" he retorted.

He followed Quin into the library where Carlotta sat. Obviously ill at ease she was, but her face lighted at his coming. Something that had been hidden before in her veiled glances was gone. She faced him with frank, open gaze.

"Ford," she said, "first I must thank you for the life you saved for me—Paul's. I'll never forget it; it's a debt I cannot repay."

"Only what he would have done for me," Ford muttered. He wondered if she would be as friendly if she knew how near he had been to taking that life she held so precious.

"But there's another debt I can pay," she continued. "Something you should know—about Paul. Better for you and for him that I tell, though he would not permit me if he were here."

"About Paul?" Something clutched at Ford's throat.

"Yes. The man you know as Paul Matthews is not your brother."

"What! Not—my—brother?"

Ford was incredulous. Carlotta must be mad; cruelly torturing him.

"He's not, Ford." Carlotta was speaking rapidly now. "He has been living a lie, as have Nina and myself. And now that you are to remain with us, it cannot go on. It isn't fair to you. My Paul is not your Paul. He is Paul Koerner, not Paul Matthews."

"Paul—Koerner." Ford remembered; Koerner was a youth convicted of murder at about the time of the rocket ship affair twenty years ago. Escaped. The structure of Ford's new life was toppling about him.

"Don't seem so shocked! It was self-defense, I tell you!" Carlotta said

fiercely. "And he was only a boy. He was a stowaway on that rocket, Ford. We found him the first day out. With his fair hair and blue eyes, he was not unlike your brother. We all noticed it, there on the rocket. Later, when both grew beards, the likeness was startling."

"Where is my brother?" Ford was suddenly suspicious, wrathful. What had they done to him here? Had Paul Koerner—

"He's dead, Ford." The woman's honest, pitying eyes held him in check. "He died only last night—in the pit. He was one of those—those creatures. My Paul had been keeping it from you."

She shuddered, paused.

Ford gritted his teeth and moved to the window. Looked out over the Square with unseeing eyes. His own flesh and blood one of the hideous creatures he had seen down there! It was monstrous.

"**W**HAT happened to them?" he asked slowly, and slumped into his chair.

"It was the radium. And Paul lied to you about the rocket ship, Ford. There was no question of producing the explosive. It was only that the ship had been wrecked beyond repair when we landed. They planned to build another and return. All but Paul Koerner; he dared not go back. He intended to remain here, and worked to that end. By himself. He was fond of your brother, Ford; tried to keep him from joining the others when they went crazy over the radium. It made of them the dreadful things you saw. The radium in huge deposits acted differently than they had known it to do on Earth; affected them this way. It was greed, Ford. They intended to gather huge

quantities of the precious element and carry it back to Earth. They would thus become enormously wealthy."

Carlotta shook her head. "I watched them fall under the spell of the radium. At first they would go down every day—exploring, they said. Longer and longer they stayed down. I noticed that when they returned their eyes were shift. They were nervous, and they began to hate us for not wanting to go down there, too."

"Toward the last they seldom came up at all. Their bodies had grown used to the intense radium rays, and they suffered great pain whenever they left. But they still hated us, and did whatever they could to hurt us. Paul could not bring himself to kill them, though—after all, they had been fellow humans."

"My husband," she went on, "Charlie Best, was one of the survivors. He too was killed last night. My conscience at last is clear."

"Your conscience?"

"Yes. You see, don't you?" she pleaded. "There was nothing else I could do. Charlie was dead to me; a monster. And I came to love Paul. We mated by Rund law, which allows polygamy on account of the high death rate and the greater number of females among them. Though the Rundts thought Charlie and the rest had died, we saved our Earth scruples in this manner. Tell me we did right, Ford."

Carlotta's eyes were wide, beseeching.

"You did exactly right"—gently. "The only thing possible."

"Thank you. We suffered in mind, though, Paul and I. He has worked for years trying to develop a cure for them; always hoping he might restore them to normalcy. It was the only matter in which we disagreed. I was

selfish perhaps, but I didn't want to see Charlie Best again. I was satisfied with things as they were."

Ford was seeing something of the greatness of the man he had thought was his brother; something of the emotions which had torn the breast of this beautiful woman who was Paul's consort.

"And they were always fighting Paul—the beasts of the pits. I was afraid, terribly afraid at times. Their intelligence and warped cunning seemed superhuman. Our chief protection lay in the fact they could not live many minutes away from the pits. Some day I feared they would kill Paul. You saw how they had stolen the robot-control; what use they made of it. And the destruction of your space ship. All the work of their fiendish minds, of the brains and hands so terribly altered by the action of the radium. There was Nina—"

"Yes, Nina!" Ford breathed. "Why did she—"

"Nina could not forget her father. They were strongly attached, those two. Poor Nina would not believe there was no hope for him. It preyed on her mind continuously. She hoped somehow to win him from the radium, to get him to cooperate in some sort of cure. She seemed unable to keep away."

"I see." That horror would be over with now, Ford thought with satisfaction. "But I don't see, Carlotta, why Paul Koerner kept up this deception with us from the beginning."

"You don't? Why, it was done entirely for you, Ford. When you first came in the space ship he was afraid, thinking you might be the advance guard of mankind, and that some day he might be forced to return to Earth to face the old charges. Then when he knew who you were he conceived



the idea of posing as your brother. He had heard so much about you from the real brother, you see. And he took instant liking to you. It would not do, he thought, to have you know that Paul Matthews had become what he was. He strove desperately to keep the horrible truth from you. I knew he was wrong in this, but he was insistent; swore Nina and me to secrecy. Now I have betrayed him."

She hesitated.

"I shall keep the secret if you wish," Ford told her. It would not be difficult to pretend brotherly feeling toward this Boss of Thren-dis. He had become an intensely human, deeply lovable character.

"No, it is best that we be honest now—all of us. Paul will agree, when he has recovered. He knows down in his heart it is best." Carlotta sighed.

"Haven't you told me enough?" Ford asked kindly. "I'm satisfied. Disappointed, of course. I had hoped to find in my brother a man exactly like your Paul. But I had given him up for lost really, these twenty years. It was a forlorn hope, thinking to find him. And now that I know for certain, it is no worse than before."

"That is good of you, Ford." Carlotta brightened. "And you have no blame in your heart for me?"

"None whatever. I shall love you as a son, if you'll let me. Though you are far too young for that. When Nina and I—"

"Oh yes, you and Nina."

Then, womanlike, she burst into tears and ran from the room.

FORD sat thinking after she had left. Now he saw it all. He could not find it in himself to censure Paul. He was only human, after all, and deeply sympathetic with un-

fortunate creatures like those of the pits, and the Runds. It was natural that Paul had no particular love of Earthmen, who had unjustly accused and convicted him.

Owen Wardell poked his head through the doorway, his lean face solemnly apologetic.

"I didn't mean to eavesdrop, Ford," he said. "I couldn't help overhearing—everything."

"What do you think of it all?"

"That Paul Koerner is a great man. Worthy of the position he has here: deserving of the peace of mind that will come to him now."

"Right. I'm sorry only that he is not—Paul Matthews."

"It is rather hard for you, Ford. To tell you the truth though, I had hardly expected to find your brother. When you were a lad I told you that to console you."

"You always believed in the space ship," Ford said drearily.

"Yes" — enthusiastically. "And that was a dream come true. One doesn't always realize one's hopes as fully."

"No, one doesn't," Ford was thinking of the dreams he had cherished. Foolish dreams, of course, and shattered now.

He closed his eyes. A vision of Nina. Best rose there to blot out the other. He nodded drowsily, smiling.

NO rain fell on Tiron that day. But in the drylands adjoining the mesa a huge lake was forming. The sands were melting away under the blast of energy and the vacant space of them was replaced with cool clear water. Later, when the energy was directed to other points, there would be many lakes; an abundance of water.

Light clouds were taking shape in

the skies; white and fluffy against the pastel green of the depths. Nature was resuming her long-forgotten functions. The rains would come afterward. Natural rain, after all these centuries. Evaporation; condensation. The ocean beds of old would fill slowly but surely. And the supply of water was to be forever inexhaustible. A new civilization would bloom on Tiron as the flowers would bloom. And no race of the universe was to suffer by the rehabilitation. As soon as possible, Ford and Owen were going to return Earth's borrowed water, restore its normal climate.

Ford took it upon himself that afternoon to give out the news that Bahspahl was recovering; and to tell of the permanency of the coming rains. In the Square he addressed thousands of the Runds, using the grinning Quin as his interpreter. And the multitude went wild with acclaim when he had finished. It was a day of celebration and joyous thanksgiving throughout the land of the Runds as the news sped forth by way of the scattered black cubes of Paul's radiophone.

In what he told them, Ford did not speak of Earth. This too had been a secret closely guarded in Square House and in the workshop on the mesa. Paul Koerner had known the Runds better than they knew themselves. Tender-hearted and self-sacrificing as they were, they would have refused this rain that had come at the expense of another civilization, had they known. That others should die to give them life was a conception not within their sympathetic natures. Paul had kept it as his own private sorrow; his conscience and his alone was to bear the burden of it all.

To the Runds he was still a god; their master and the savior of Tiron.

And so Bahspahl would remain, if Ford could make it so.

DINNER in Square House was a gala event. Paul was missing, but Yoril had pronounced him definitely out of danger. The appetites of the others had returned and their spirits rose with the knowledge that all dissimulation was a thing of the past; that all barriers had been finally torn down.

When they rose from the table Ford whispered in Nina's ear:

"Come to our library. I've a joke to play on Owen. Bring Carlotta."

"What do you want to turn that thing on for?" Owen growled, when the three had entered the room.

Ford had opened the visiphone, grinning.

"Told you I'd get even with you before the day was over," he said, "for that wisecrack you made this morning. Listen."

A pompous voice came faintly from the instrument, echoing weirdly in the impression it conveyed of coming from the depths of the void:

"Earth has conquered this menace of another world. She remains the undisputed queen of this universe of ours. The Martians are beaten at their own game. We have triumphed over this dastardly attempt to end our existence—"

"What a nerve!" Owen exploded. "He'd sing another tune if I were to turn the projector's energy to Earth again."

"Listen!" Ford broke in. He was smiling broadly, leaning against the wall with Nina clinging to his arm.

"—the man responsible for it all. Ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor of presenting Dr. John Holden."

The man's face was in the disk then,

red and flustered; bowing and snirking.

"When I discovered this force the Martians were sending to destroy us, I—"

Snarling, Owen flipped the lever.

"Can you beat that?" he raged. "He discovered it! Wait until I get hold of him! We'll go back, Ford, and I'll tell him a thing or two!"

"Go back!" Ford's gleeful smile vanished, and Nina clung to him the tighter. "What do you mean, go back?"

"Of course we will! I should have told you before. I can build a ship exactly like the other. Every detail is in

my mind, and we have everything necessary; materials; clever workmen. Nothing at all is lacking. A year, perhaps, it will take. Then we can return."

Ford's eyes were suddenly bright; swimming. He drew Nina to him.

"What do you say, sweetheart?" he asked.

"We'll go!" she said brightly.

"We'll—how do you say it?—commute. Spend part of our time here; part there. Together always."

She kissed him, impetuously. Happily.

Carlotta smiled enigmatically as she and Owen watched.

THE END.



## Hidden Money

**S**ELDOM do competent dealers in old books place such volumes on their shelves until a careful inspection has been made. This is particularly true when books of our Civil War era are purchased, for in the South where doubts were entertained of the result of the great struggle, Federal bank notes were frequently hoarded between the leaves.

In the Latin-American countries where revolutions are sudden and frequent, and family treasures are buried to escape the hands of looters, maps showing the location of the cache have been hidden in the bindings of books. Later the volumes reached the book stalls because of the death or disappearance of their owners, and the purchasers have profited by finding the maps.

Not long ago the chest of a deceased sailor was disposed of at a sale conducted by a small New York hotel. In the chest the purchaser found an ancient history bound in heavy leather, that bore the stamp of a second-hand dealer in Santo Domingo City. Inspection of the cover disclosed a smooth bulge, well pasted over with time worn paper. On ripping this open, five hundred dollars in American bills of large denominations were disclosed.

*Charles Adams.*

**M**IDNIGHT is ever an hour of mystery and danger; and the air-liner which circled the globe from Madrid to New York and Tokyo and back to Madrid in a day, never left that hour—nor did it escape danger and mystery. Don't miss next week's "Flyer of Eternal Midnight," by Ray Cummings.



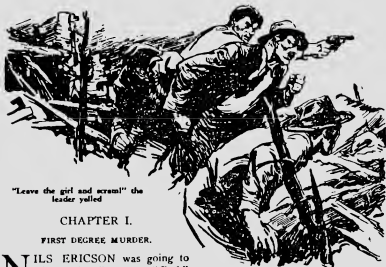
# World's End

# World's End

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Author of "The Vengeance Trail," "The Branded Man," etc.

*Nils Ericson was due to die for a murder he had not committed—  
if the comet let the world last that long*



"Leave the girl and scream!" the leader yelled

## CHAPTER I.

### FIRST DEGREE MURDER.

**N**ILS ERICSON was going to the chair. So were "Red" Lewis and Paul Antonelli. A jury of citizens of Nassau County, New York, was going to send them there. They were doomed as surely as if the verdict had already been pronounced, and knew it. Each of the three could read his fate in the faces of the twelve good men and true as the presiding judge summed up at dusk in the courthouse at Mineola, Long Island.

Nils knew that the State had him where it wanted him, though he was innocent. Police Chief Tom Garry and the prosecuting attorney had used all the mechanism of their trade. After twenty-four hours of the third degree, Lewis and Antonelli had confessed,

and implicated Nils. Of course, they had recanted, and Nils didn't care. A guy will admit almost anything when he has been sufficiently slugged with a rubber hose. They hadn't slugged Nils, though, only kept up a twenty-four hours barrage of questioning. The police knew their stuff.

Yes, and they knew their man. No torture could have wrung a confession from Nils. He was an American of the second generation, almost a giant in stature, a blond Viking in appearance, a primitive type overlaid with a veneer of education. Uncouth, not sullen. A misfit through environment rather than heredity. Now he was lis-

tening to the judge as he summed up. Nils had all the fatalism of his northern race. He didn't care. They'd got him for something that he hadn't done. That was all right. He might have participated in the crime, if Red and Antonelli had taken him into their confidence when they hired his taxi. Though cold-blooded murder was foreign to his nature. Anyway, Nils didn't care.



Nils sprang to meet the rush

The electric lights had been turned on in the courtroom, but out of the east a long, fanlike streak of brilliant light shone through the windows, dimming them. The judge stopped in his charge to the jury.

"Pull down that shade!" he rasped.

A court attendant hastened to obey. The comet vanished, that comet ten times brighter than any of which the world had record, transforming night into high noon. A comet with a head as large as the moon, which, some averred, was going to tear the world to pieces. But the leading scientists

derided this. It had done its worst, they said, in producing the eruptions and floods that had devastated nearly every continent. And, anyway, America was safe. All were insistent as to that.

The comet wasn't going to stop them from putting Nils on the hot seat. And he didn't care. He frowned down

scornfully upon the quaking crooks beside him, shrugged his shoulders.

A policeman grabbed him by the arm. Red Lewis and Antonelli were already descending the steps that led to the cells. The jury was retiring to consider its verdict. It wasn't likely to be out long. The judge had announced that he would be ready to receive the verdict before midnight.

Outside a newsboy was shouting, "Another earthquake in Chile! All the latest news about the comet!"

Nils sat down in his separate cell. Guilty—of course they'd find him

guilty. There had been too many killings since the arrival of the comet. People had gone crazy. It was said that the tail exuded a poisonous exhalation that made men irresponsible. Society had to protect itself—while it lasted. No mercy for criminals now!

So long as Sing Sing stood, the electric chair would be working overtime. And nobody believed in the scaremongers. It seemed incredible that people would stop buying and selling, quarreling and making love—and burning murderers.

Nils's father had been a farmer on Long Island. After the recovery from the world depression, in 1933, he had done well. There had been five years of jobs for everybody. Then four years more of depression before economists realized that society would have to be reorganized.

Too much food in the world, too many goods, too many workers, too many machines. Socialism, anarchy, revolution—or the armed repression and the public doles that had enabled America to stagger on under the old forms of government. Rich men—one to each hundred of a dole-fed population, living secluded lives on their estates, protected by armed guards. Such men as Jared Enderby.

When Nils's father died, the farm had been confiscated for taxes. Nils had never been to high school. A great, uncouth, gangling lad, with a pair of fists that made him supreme among his kind, he seemed destined for manual labor. A son of Martha, not of Mary. No one dreamed of the big thoughts in his brain, the vague lust for dominion over men and nature. The sullen, slumberous depths of him had never yet been stirred to action.

Nils had worked with pick and shovel, bossed men, and then, through

a lucky stroke, had got a job as driver of one of New York's municipal taxicabs. He had a room in a cheap tenement house on Eleventh Avenue, and subsisted on his earnings of about a hundred dollars a week—which was a mere pittance with the inflated currency of the year 1942.

HE had never even seen Red Lewis or Antonelli before that night when they stopped him at Columbus Circle and offered him two hundred dollars for the night trip out on Long Island. It was illegal to take private fares, for the city's means of traffic were organized to transport the workers to and from their jobs. Nils knew that something was wrong.

But he didn't guess right. With the enormous tax on distilled liquors, following the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, rum-smuggling had become even more lucrative than in the old days of Prohibition.

Rum-smugglers, of course, but—wrong? Not as Nils saw it. That two hundred dollars looked mighty big to him. So he had parked near Jared Enderby's house, at the edge of the big estate that sloped down toward the waters of the Sound, and waited. They'd told him he'd have to wait an hour or two. Quite O. K. for Nils.

Half an hour later shots had rung out, and the big house had become a blaze of light. Red Lewis came running back alone, blood pouring down his sleeve. "Step on her!" he yelled, as he leaped into the taxi.

Nils had got as far as the next village when the motor-cops surrounded him and opened fire, blew up his tires and sent his windshield smashing about his ears. It was not until then that Nils learned of the attempted robbery of old Enderby's safe, of the shooting

down of the two armed guards, and of Antonelli's capture.

Nils was going over the trial again. The two crooks had been caught in Mrs. Enderby's bedroom, where the jewels were hidden. They had been identified by Jared Enderby, his wife, and Kay, the twenty-one-year-old daughter. Mrs. Enderby had sworn there was a third man, a big man with blond hair.

Under pressure upon the witness stand she had identified Nils.

Kay Enderby had stood out for him. No, there were only two men. Nils hadn't been one of them. Lovely, in spite of her distress, unshaken, in spite of the prosecuting attorney's insistence, she had been Nils's best witness. But the judge had pointed out that Nils's presence in the house, or absence from it, made no difference. He had been one of the gang, equally guilty if he had known their plans.

It was a long time since Nils had seen a girl like Kay Enderby, among the crowds of shabby folks who thronged the streets of New York. Some folks had all the breaks. Nils might have gotten him a girl like Kay, if things had been different. The sight of her had stirred that slumberous berserk instinct in him, to fight, achieve and conquer.

Wealth and dominion, and a girl like Kay Enderby!

**T**HERE were quick movements at the head of the stairs, and shouting, then heavy footsteps in the corridor. Cell doors clicked open. Nils heard Antonelli's whining protest; then his own door opened, and two policemen stood in the entrance.

"Come along and get yours, big boy," said one of them. "The jury's coming into the courtroom."

Nils smiled, but his smile was more like the snarl of a beast at bay. "Weren't out long," he said. "Well, what's the verdict likely to be?"

"You'll know quick enough," grinned the other. "Get a move on, big fellow!"

Nils stepped out of his cell. Each of the policemen had a pistol in his hand. They were big men, but Nils towered above them. There had been no need to speculate about the verdict. First degree, of course. The jury couldn't have been out more than an hour, with the lives of three men at stake. It had been a foregone conclusion, in spite of Kay Enderby's testimony.

For an instant Nils felt that suppressed fury rising up within him, a murderous beast, tugging at its leash. To smash the two policemen to the floor, to make a dash for freedom . . .

Nils dallied with the thought during that instant. But common sense came to his aid, and showed him that the plan was impossible. Still, that was not what restrained him. It was pride. If he could have died in the attempt, he would have made it. But he would only be hammered senseless and recaptured. Some better chance might come.

As if sensing what was in his mind, the two policemen had moved in closer. With a shrug of his broad shoulders, Nils went up the stairs again, in the wake of the two crooks.

"All about the earthquakes! All about the comet! Long Island Sound goes dry!"

Newsboys were bawling everywhere about the courthouse. And, though the shades were drawn, and the electric lights were burning, there was an unnatural brightness without that dimmed the light within. High over-



head the great comet sprawled, a fiery sign of doom writ in the heavens.

Only about a dozen men had waited in the courtroom to hear the death verdict. Even that had lost its thrill in the presence of that awful seneschal of the skies. Outside, the crowds congested all the approaches and filled the streets, white faces blinking upward at that messenger of doom.

Some one was calling for silence. But there was silence in the courtroom already. The jury was filing in. The few spectators rose as the judge entered and took his seat. His movements were quick and nervous. He knew what the verdict must be, and he wanted to get the proceedings over.

Nils, glancing sardonically at the faces of the twelve, saw that each man's face was turned away, a sure sign of the decision.

A gavel fell. The court clerk was speaking to the foreman. Now the foreman was answering. Nils heard: "We find the defendants, Alfred Lewis, Paul Antonelli, and Nils Ericson, guilty of murder . . . in the first degree, as charged."

A gasp from Red, a muttered snarl from the Italian. But Nils grinned and threw back his shoulders.

At the demand of the young lawyer who had been assigned to the defense, the jury was being polled. Nils wasn't listening any longer. Again he seemed to see the face of Kay Enderby upon the witness stand. To win his freedom, to fight, to crush, to snatch her for himself, and, with her, wealth, power, dominion. Or to go down to death, battling with berserk fury . . . such were his thoughts.

A policeman grasped his arm, and he turned and plodded down the steps. The sentence was to be pronounced upon the morrow. Nils had heard that

much. Just one of the law's little jokes, that was all.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ENDERBY HOME.

JARED ENDERBY'S estate was one of the largest on the north shore of Long Island. It covered about a thousand acres, and included an experimental farm, a rich man's hobby. It employed about a score of domestics and outdoor workers. The imposing house, built in imitation of a Florentine palace, rose out of a grove of trees not more than a mile from the Sound.

It was of white stone, with a long, winding drive leading up to the long terrace. Behind it were the garage and stables, and an older garage that had been converted into a headquarters for Enderby's armed guards, doubly a necessity since the advent of the comet had loosed the already tottering social system.

Inside the house was a long hall, its floor covered with an enormous rug, woven in imitation of a famous prayer-rug at Ispahan. Two complete sets of fifteenth century armor guarded the threshold, and above them were helmets, maces, swords, battle-axes, genuine antiques which Jared Enderby had procured in Europe.

It was an interesting taste in a man whose bloodiest interest consisted in eighteen holes of golf with the rector of Saint John's. Perhaps it corresponded to some submerged fighting part of his nature—for Jared Enderby was one of the most aggressive speculators in the Street. He neither asked nor received quarter. The former would have been useless, and the latter was unnecessary.

Jared Enderby was standing on the upper porch of his home. With him was the Reverend Philip Haynes, who had been his guest at dinner that evening. From the drawing room behind them came the faint sounds of a male and a female voice, blending with the louder tones of jazz from the loud-speaker.

At that moment Walter Ferrand, Jared's confidential representative, was asking Kay for the tenth time to marry him, but Kay, not in the least disturbed, was telling him that she felt more like a sister to him.

"I'm certainly glad that Mrs. Enderby has arrived safely at Pinehurst," the rector, a jolly, red-faced man of fifty, with thick, white hair, was saying. "I suppose that she'll be staying there till—till that thing's gone."

He looked up at the comet, blazing from the horizon to the zenith, its head, a ball of vivid, blue-white flame, dimming the full moon that hung in the east.

"Yes, for at least a month," Jared answered. "They say it will have become invisible by then. Of course, I don't take any stock in that absurd scandalmongering, but Pinehurst is supposed to stand on a strip of paleozoic rock, or something of the sort, I understand, and neither earthquakes nor tidal waves can touch it. And, after the shock of the burglary, and the shooting, you understand—"

"I certainly do. And I hope those three ruffianly murderers have already received their just sentence," replied the rector. "It may sound unchristian to say that, but in these days society has got to protect itself. Since that thing appeared"—he looked up at the comet again—"the masses seem to have got completely out of hand.

"Why, who would have believed,

even five years ago, that a man in your position would have to protect his family and himself with armed guards?"

There was a touch of bitterness in Jared Enderby's assent. He had built his home so he could live like a country gentleman, and he had become a prisoner instead.

Since the advent of the comet he had had an armed escort to the specially guarded train that was known as the "millionaires' special," and conveyed him and others from the big estates nearby into New York each morning.

Armed guards patrolling his grounds, and watching over Kay whenever she left the house, an armed chauffeur accompanying himself or his daughter whenever either of them went out driving—who would have expected to live to see such times?

It had been bad enough since the depression had come back, but, since the advent of the comet, Long Island had become the stamping ground for all the thugs in Queens. Hold-ups, robberies, kidnappings were of almost daily occurrence everywhere within a radius of fifty miles of New York.

Which explained the vehemence with which the Reverend Philip Haynes had spoken.

"I GUESS we'll get things reorganized after the comet's gone," said Jared. "They say the worst is over, though nobody seems able to explain why the Sound has gone dry. Well, there's going to be a big expenditure on public works, if New York is to remain a port. Dredging the Sound and the Narrows will create employment, anyway, and perhaps start the wheels of prosperity revolving once more.

"And it's no secret to you, Philip, that big things are impending at Washington. We can't run the country with our antiquated Constitution. Not Fascism exactly, but some device to put competent men at the head of things, even if it involves a sort of *coup d'état*."

"Hannings, of the Jamaica Trust, Loan and Mortgage Association, stands pretty close to some of the big men—well, to myself and Morgan Filson. He's got a big pull at Albany, you know, and we can swing things at Washington enough to—well, I think there's a big surprise coming, Philip."

"Well, any change will certainly have to be for the better," replied the rector. "By the way, it's a queer thing about the golf course, isn't it?"

"What's that?" queried Jared.

"Haven't you heard about it? Why, a goodish portion of the course has become flooded. It's turned into a shallow lake, with a regular swamp around it, this last week-end. You know that depression in the middle of the twelfth hole? Yesterday it was a pond two feet deep. I had a brassie shot that would have gone clean onto the green, and the ball dropped into that confounded water-trap."

"We'll have to have a game," said Jared. "Maybe to-morrow. Hello, my dear." He turned as Kay appeared upon the porch, followed by a slightly built, well-dressed man of about thirty, of the executive type.

"Dad, it's just come over the radio. They've convicted Nils Ericson," said Kay. "It's 'guilty of murder in the first degree.' Oh, dad, something must be done about it!"

Jared Enderby took a step toward the girl, who was leaning against the porch wall. Her face was deathly white. He didn't know what to say.

As a matter of fact, he had believed her story, that Nils had not been in the house, rather than her mother's hysterical tale. But, after all, the taxi driver had been in the plot. He was guilty equally with the two others.

And Jared had bitterly resented his daughter's having to appear upon the witness stand at all.

"Dad, you must do something," Kay was pleading. "I'm sure that poor fellow was simply the dupe of those two other men. I'll never forget the look in his eyes when I was giving my evidence."

The rector cleared his throat. "My dear Miss Kay," he protested, "you surely realize that he had every opportunity to place his case before a jury. The State appointed a very good lawyer to defend him. Even if he was not in this house, at least he was privy to the murder plot."

"He knew nothing about it," answered Kay. "He's innocent."

The air of finality with which she said this seemed to leave no loophole for response. The Reverend Philip Haynes shook his head in a deprecating manner. Kay turned to her father.

"Dad, you've got some influence, surely?" she asked.

"Not in that field, my dear. If it was a matter of raising a few million dollars now—"

"You know the prosecuting attorney, Mr. Gregson. If you'll exert your influence with him, I'm sure something can be done. At least, you can hire the best lawyer available, to take the case to the Court of Appeals."

Walter Ferrand, the young fellow who had been with Kay in the drawing room when the news came over the radio, advanced, touched Kay's arm. He was one of the select band whom Jared Enderby had marked for ad-

vancement in his trust company Jared seldom made a mistake, and, besides having a pretty level head, Walter had all the social requirements for success.

And he could play a good game of golf, and his score seldom touched ninety-five.

"I'm sure Mr. Enderby will do all he can in the matter, Kay," he said. "But, after all, why should you distress yourself about such a ruffian?"

The words were not tactful, but then neither Walter Ferrand, nor Jared, nor anybody else had ever been able to discover why Kay was so interested in the fate of Nils Ericson. It was impossible to imagine a girl of her upbringing being sentimentally interested in the fate of a blond-headed murderer, who had nearly frightened her mother to death besides killing two of the guards.

Kay turned toward Walter. "Do you know, sometimes I almost think I hate you?" she asked bitterly.

KAY lay in her bed, her mind a whirl of conflicting thoughts.

Downstairs she could still hear the radio blaring away. The President was speaking from Washington, leading a symposium of astronomers, who were addressing a nation-wide audience upon the subject of the comet.

The peril had already passed, he was saying, his rich, vibrant voice filling the room. At nine o'clock that night the comet had rounded the sun. It was speeding back into outer space, and not for millions of years would it reappear to trouble mankind. By that time—if he might speak frankly—it was probable that the political differences which separated the two major parties of the United States would have been composed.

Just the right touch, the little note

of humor that was likely to reassure the public. Business as usual, and everything was fine. God's gifted land had been spared the horrors that had overtaken other nations.

Kay lay sleepless for a long time after the loudspeaker had ceased, and Walter Ferrand and the rector had driven away. The news of Nils Ericson's conviction had so stunned her that everything seemed to have become unreal.

Three weeks before—two weeks before, she had accepted Walter as a part of the comfortable, if guarded life that she had always known. He was her regular escort to the country club. He had asked her several times to marry him, and Kay hadn't been sure that she wouldn't accept him one of these days.

But the trial scene had shocked her even more than the burglary and the shooting, the sight of the poverty about her, the dreadful atmosphere of the courtroom, the tragedy of the three men on trial for their lives.

She had quarreled with her mother when Mrs. Enderby had identified Nils as one of her assailants. She knew Nils hadn't been in the house, and she had fought hard for his life upon the witness stand.

Now it had all been in vain, and Kay groped frantically for some means of saving him.

Her father might be cajoled into hiring a good lawyer to represent Nils before the Court of Appeals. But he would probably talk and promise, and let the matter slide. She must act herself. She must see Gregson, the prosecuting attorney, the first thing in the morning, and insist that there had been a miscarriage of justice. To Kay, supreme in her little world, this seemed no difficult matter.

But her father would never let her go into Mineola without a guard, and not even with one, if he knew what her purpose was. She must slip out of the house.

"You may put the lights out, Pomposon," Kay heard her father saying to the English butler.

Fortified by her resolution, Kay composed herself to sleep.

### CHAPTER III.

#### TRAIL OF THE COMET.

IT was barely three weeks, though it seemed an eternity, since the great comet had swung into view, blazing its way through the firmament in its parabolic course around the sun. In that course it would come mighty close to Earth.

It was no nebulous orb, like other comets of history, but a blue-hot star, ten times the size of the sun, and with a fan-like tail, pulled out by solar attraction, which stretched half-way across the heavens. The tail was of the thinnest of gases, it was true, but the head was the peril.

The great star had been visible by day and night, and for nights past crowds in all the cities of America had filled all the open spaces to watch its progress in Earth's direction. Yet there had been a strange fatalism, in spite of the dire predictions of the scaremongers that the end of the world was at hand. Life had gone on just the same as before the comet blazed into the skies. And, in any case, human existence couldn't be worse, even if the world was going to be pulled out of shape, like a rubber ball, or blown to cinders, as some astronomers predicted, by the pull of the vast, hostile body.

One scientist had calculated that it had a periodicity of millions of years. On its last advent, he announced, it had pulled the moon out of the bed of the Pacific, and sent it hurtling into the skies, to be Earth's satellite.

All along the Andes, through Japan, New Zealand, Italy, Iceland, wherever a geological "fault" existed, there had been eruptions on a scale never before known in history. Half Sicily had been devastated by the blowing up of Etna. The summit of Vesuvius had descended over Naples in molten, raining rock.

Twice daily enormous tides had swept the globe. Islands had vanished, new ones had ascended from the depths. Each hour the radio announced some new disaster somewhere.

But, unless the whole world was disrupted, New York was safe, Professor Clay, of Harvard, had averred. There existed no geological fault except a minor one about a hundred miles out in the Atlantic. The city was built upon the oldest, solidest rocks in the world. She was safe, even admitting that the sea channel had risen, that a string of liners was stranded off the Narrows, and that Long Island Sound was dwindling to a mere thread of water winding through a marsh.

And, even though fugitives were pouring inland daily from the threatened Pacific Coast, America was safe from the Rockies to the Alleghanies. The President himself had broadcasted that fact almost nightly for two weeks past. The rocks beneath the greater portion of Uncle Sam's domain were as solid as Uncle Sam himself.

Which was not exactly true, but none of the experts was going to deny it, and, had any done so, no newspaper would have published his statement.

And the comet was passing. It was rounding the sun, rushing back into

the depths of space. It had done its worst, and old Earth, in spite of tides and eruptions, had stood reasonably firm.

**I**N the great broadcasting station on Long Island, two men, who were waiting to speak, smiled cynically at each other as that deep bass voice, relayed over several hundred miles of wires, boomed unquenchable optimism.

One of them was a professor at a Californian university. The other was a famous English physicist named Ridgway, who had happened to be on a visit to America when the great comet flashed into human ken.

The professor turned to his companion. "Well, he'll keep them quiet until noon to-morrow, at any rate," he said, "and then I guess nothing will make any difference."

"Three minutes after noon," the Englishman corrected him. "What shall we be then, I wonder? Shall we unconsciously solve the problem of force versus matter? Shall we be hydrogen particles in the heart of the sun, battering one another in our mad endeavor to reach the zero of outer space? A hell of heat such as the imaginations of even the theologians have never attained to!"

"Whatever we are destined to be," said the professor, "fortunately all consciousness will have disappeared forever. And Nature will continue on her serene way as calmly as if our petty personalities had never risen up to question her.

"I sent my daughter a draft for five hundred dollars this morning, payable in Paris. She's taking a course at the Sorbonne. And I received a tax bill, which I didn't pay. Now why did I send that draft and leave the tax unpaid?"

"Human nature," said the physicist. "Queer how our complex carbon compounds can evolve mentality and will! By the way, how many of these men know," he asked, indicating the assembled scientists, "that at exactly three minutes after noon to-morrow, the combined pull of sun, moon, and comet, will produce the climax of the heavenly comedy, and send Earth flying into a trillion fragments?"

"I guess most of them know," replied his friend. "And, if you ask me, I'll say they're putting up a pretty good front. Hello! The President's signing off. You're next, aren't you? You're not going to tell the public that—"

"I am not," answered the Englishman. "I'm going to land the public the best line of what you call 'bunk' that I can manufacture."

"You'll be staying with us in New York to-night?"

"I don't think so. There's quite a nice little hotel out here. I think I shall spend my last night here and meditate upon the inscrutable destiny of man, and sleep late in the morning."

By executive order, the press throughout the nation had been clamped down. Nobody was to know, until late the following afternoon, when, it was believed, the danger would be definitely over, that the coast of California had been engulfed in the Pacific.

From the tip of lower California to Oregon, and, again, from British Columbia to the north of Alaska, the coast had become a steaming ruin.

San Francisco and Los Angeles, a hundred towns and villages had been wiped out in the latest and most terrible of all the eruptions. The great mass of the Rockies, crumpled up æons before by the westward drift of the American continents, had heaved itself

skyward another mile, spewing its top across the intervening desert. And simultaneously the whole Pacific Coast had dropped five thousand fathoms under the sea.

All the machinery of the government had been put to work to keep the knowledge of this from the East. Newspapers had been censored, telegraph offices had been closed, and the Federal air police had halted every eastbound plane, even mail planes, and forced them to descend.

Within a day or two the news must leak out. But by that time the president believed that emergency measures could be taken to insure the continuance of law and order throughout the Middle West and East.

In justice to him it must be said that he, in turn, had been kept in ignorance of the doom that impended over Earth. The President's optimistic broadcasts had been quite sincere. At that moment a proclamation of martial law lay on his desk, awaiting his signature, and he had just turned away from the microphone that had been installed in the White House with the consciousness of duty done.

Perhaps the Englishman and his American friend had been the only two persons who had been sure of their facts, among those who thronged the broadcasting station, awaiting their turns to spread the message of optimism among the waiting millions.

There was even the possibility that they had been wrong in their calculations.

**A** THOUSAND towns and villages between New York and Kansas listened to the messages of good cheer that came from the broadcasting station. A million families went happily to bed, encouraged by the informa-

tion that the danger which had threatened Earth had passed.

Millions of others seized the occasion to make a celebration of the good news. Enormous throngs surrounded the loudspeakers in the parks and streets that transmitted the good news.

The City of New York was making revel, as if this night were election night. Young women, armed with metal stars with long, colored streamers, tickled the faces of those who struggled through the throngs. Peddlers plied a brisk trade in comet-shaped balloons that swayed above the heads of the populace.

Jokes, laughter, parties on roof-tops, gazing skyward. Nowhere was there any panic. The mighty buildings of New York, rising white and majestic, seemed a guarantee of permanence and stability. Lovers sat in the parks, absorbed in each other. This, too, was permanent. The comet was the big joke of the century, and it appealed to America's sense of humor. It was less real than poverty, joblessness, quarrels and makings up, the routine actions of the day.

A grimmer touch was the armed police cars that patrolled the streets. In outlying districts, homes were barricaded against desperate men who slunk through the shadows cast by the blazing star high overhead. In Union Square a madman, standing on a soap-box, was proclaiming the imminent end of the world. The police pulled him down and hustled him away.

At nine o'clock that night the comet had passed the sun. Each moment the danger was growing less. And New York still stood! After midnight a spirit of boisterous turbulence took hold of the populace. The streets, already packed, grew jammed. Swaying, seething crowds, their heads craned up-

ward, watching. If the sun rose on the morrow, all would be well. The sun would rise! A huge illuminated sign on the Times Building was saying:

AT SUNRISE THE COMET WILL BE  
RUSHING BACK INTO OUTER SPACE  
THE DANGER IS ALREADY PAST THE  
WORLD IS SAFE.

The night wore on. Everywhere the roaring crowds patrolled the streets. They were looking eastward now. Looking for the promised sunrise of the day of liberation. Not until the sun appeared above the horizon would the cold brilliance of the blue-white star begin to pale a little.

But there were red streaks in the east, over Brooklyn, and, with a spontaneous movement, the crowds began surging toward the East River. The east grew rosy; suddenly, above the skyline, the sun's rim appeared.

A great shout of exultation rose from the throats of the packed multitudes.

## CHAPTER IV.

### ON THE LINKS.

JARED ENDERBY thought that Kay was sleeping late when he took his seat beside the armed chauffeur and started toward the golf club after an early breakfast.

He had arranged to meet Mr. Haynes at ten, and they would play a pleasant, leisurely round by half-past twelve. There was a substantial friendship between Jared and the jovial rector, who was, of course, an honorary member of the club.

Jared Enderby looked up at the great star, trailing its luminous tail across the sky, the star a huge moon, the tail, by daylight, a tenuous thread across the horizon.

"Well, Jenkins, I guess that fellow's done his worst," he addressed his chauffeur as they sped along the country road. "You heard the President on the radio last night, and those other fellows?"

"We did, sir," answered the chauffeur. "I guess the danger's over now. A lot of fuss about nothing. I'll tell you, sir," he continued, with sudden gravity, "no matter what happens to them foreign nations, God won't let any harm come to America."

"Sort of most-favored-nation clause in the celestial organization, eh?" smiled Jared genially. "Well, I'm not so sure I don't agree with you, Jenkins."

The high-powered car ran inland. It passed through a village, where a policeman, with one of the last remaining stop-go signs left in America, was directing non-existent traffic. The officer, recognizing Jared's car, spun the sign swiftly, and brought his hand to his cap. Jared waved to him genially as he passed.

Nothing seemed to have changed in the past few years, Jared was thinking, except that there were shabbier groups at the corner drug-and-beer stores, and the houses needed painting. Well, all that would be remedied, now the comet was departing. The world would have to be reorganized. Not socialism, though. More along the lines of a plan that a number of powerful men had been secretly working out for some time past—a national committee of trust heads, in control of all commodities.

The clubhouse came into sight, a long, red building, set pleasantly in a grove of trees. Some half dozen cars were already drawn up in front of it. On either side the links extended, red and white flags fluttering in the slight



breeze, and here and there little groups of players were visible. It was all so natural that even the huge white star overhead seemed no longer hostile.

The Reverend Philip Haynes was waiting at the entrance to the first green, with two caddies. It was understood that, when the two played golf, Jared Enderby paid for the caddies.

"Well, Phil, on time as usual," said the financier genially. "How's that twelfth hole that you were speaking about last night?"

"You'll have to switch to the fourth course at the eleventh hole, Mr. Enderby," said one of the boys. "The lower part of the first course is mostly under water."

Jared Enderby was not much interested in natural phenomena. He had accepted the narrowing of Long Island Sound exactly as he would have accepted the drying up of his artificial lily and goldfish pond, something to be remedied by a gang of plumbers and some cement. He drove two hundred yards from the first tee and grinned as the Reverend Philip sliced his ball into the stubble. With a satisfied smile he started down the fairway.

"How's that for a neat five?" he chuckled as the rector holed his ball in eight, after what sounded suspiciously like an invocation to the nether deity.

"It was that confounded sand-pit," grumbled the rector. "But this is my lucky hole, Enderby. Watch me!"

THE two men drove in succession, sending their balls straight down the fairway within a few feet of each other. They started after them side by side.

"Phil, I'm worried about Kay," Jared confided as they set off. "I don't

like the way she's worrying about that ruffian who was sentenced to the chair last night. I'm afraid she's going to let me in for a peck of trouble about him."

"Oh, I guess she'll forget about him," answered the rector. "After all, it was a trying experience for her, having to give evidence at the trial."

"She went off to bed without another word to me," Jared complained. "That means there's something brewing in her mind. I'm afraid there's going to be a storm when I get back."

He was worried because he couldn't see anything to do about the matter. And to hire a lawyer to appeal on Kay's behalf would mean more trouble when his wife got home. Mrs. Enderby had insisted that Nils had been in her room. So he spoke little for the next hour or so. The rector's score was three ahead of his, an unusual thing, but he didn't care as much as usual. He was aroused from his thoughts when, after dropping his ball into the eleventh hole, he became aware of a great sheet of water extending beyond, like an inland lake.

"Why—when did this get here?" he asked his caddy in astonishment.

"She's been swelling up quick since yesterday, Mr. Enderby," answered the boy. "They say it's the water seeping in from the Sound."

Jared moved along the soggy fairway. And now he could see that the lake was increasing in size at an appreciable rate. It was creeping toward him at the rate of some six inches a minute. A prodigious quantity of water must be pouring in through some subterranean channel.

"It's dry over on the fourth course, sir," said the caddy, trailing along with the bag of clubs.

"Look, Phil, what's that over

there?" cried Jared, pointing toward the eastern horizon.

Jared Enderby was not given to admiring natural scenery. His emotions at the sight of a lake or mountain, or a cloud effect, might generally have been summarized by the words "pretty," or "picturesque." But something queer was undoubtedly happening in the east.

A reddish cloud hung low over the horizon, and it seemed to be extending rapidly across the sky. A blood-colored cloud, coming up with the rapidity of a thunderstorm, and racing toward the zenith, where that monstrous star was blazing. And even where Jared stood the air seemed to be thickening, and changing to the color of blood—a rusty red.

Everything was curiously still, yet somewhere there seemed to be a faint and distant rumbling, though so far away that Jared was conscious of it by some interior perception rather than by hearing.

The rector came to his side. "What is it, Enderby?" he asked in a husky whisper. "It looks like—like the Day of Judgment!"

"Oh, snap out of it and pull yourself together, Phil!" answered Jared. "Volcanic dust, probably, from some eruption somewhere. It travels all round the globe."

"The Day of Judgment—clouds and glory," muttered the Reverend Philip Haynes, as if he had not heard.

The caddies were likewise staring up at that advancing cloud. And even Jared, in spite of his robust common sense, felt something indescribably awesome in that mounting opacity which had already blotted out the sun. Its edges touched the head of the comet, which shone through it with a strange and sepulchral light.

The cry of a bobolink was the only thing that broke the silence, and that was not repeated. There was no sound anywhere, and it was growing twilight, as on the occasion of a solar eclipse.

"**S**HALL we cross to the fourth course—or shall we turn back?" chattered the rector.

"Maybe it's a typhoon," said Jared, fighting down his sense of terror. He glanced angrily about him. Even the caddies seemed afraid. The fears of his companions were infecting him.

He pulled himself together. "I don't care what you do, Phil," he answered in a voice that he strove hard to render calm. "I'm going to finish this game."

He turned in the direction of the fourth course, the nearest green of which was about two hundred yards away. He put his ball on a tee, took his stance and swung his brassie.

Never had Jared Enderby struck his ball more truly. He felt the impact of the club upon it at exactly the proper place. And yet that ball appeared to be possessed of a devil.

It shot straight forward for about a hundred yards, then suddenly curved upward and came soaring back toward him like a boomerang. It thudded into the turf beside him. At the same instant a violent shock precipitated Jared to the ground.

He picked himself up with an oath, quite regardless of the rector's presence. He got to his feet. He couldn't stand straight. It was as if an invisible and gigantic hand was pushing him forward. It was as if the whole world had suddenly got out of plumb.

The racing clouds of red had almost covered the sky. Through them the huge star seemed to grin like a death's head. Then a deluge of water struck Jared and flung him down again.

A roaring hurricane, arising instantaneously out of the silence, lashed him with torrents of ice-cold rain. Rain salt upon his lips, as if the red cloud had snatched up all the waters of the sea and was pouring them upon the land in a new universal deluge.

The rain lashed Jared's face like whips. He had never conceived the possibility of such a storm as that. Hammered flat by the torrent, he felt as if he was being knouted by a giant.

He groaned, and tried to shield his face with his hands. "Phill! Phill!" he bawled.

There came no answer. The red cloud that surrounded him had changed to blackness. Jared Enderby lay flattened against the sod, lashed by the pitiless whips of the rain, while overhead the mighty hurricane roared and thundered.

**H**E must have lost consciousness for a while. When he came back to himself he was lying in a shallow depression in the ground, beaten out by the force of the tempest, and he was acting in every limb.

The rain was still lashing him, but less violently, and it was no longer icy cold. Nor did it taste salt upon his lips. A genial warmth pervaded the air. Groaning, Jared raised his head and looked up through thick, swirling mists.

"A cloudburst," he muttered. "It's that damned comet. I'm going home."

But there was no longer any sign of the comet through the mists, not even the least luminosity in the sky, from which that drizzling downpour of lukewarm rain descended.

But through the fog, to Jared's immense relief, there came the rector's voice. "Enderby! Enderby! Where are you?" it sounded.

"Here, here!" shouted Jared, trying to struggle to his feet. "There's been a cloudburst or something. Where are the caddies?"

He yelled, but no answer came. Only the muttered objurations of the rector, as he wormed his way along the rain-drenched swamp to Jared's side.

"Where have you been?" asked the Reverend Philip. "I've been calling you this half-hour past."

"Been? I've been here," snapped Jared. "That confounded cloudburst knocked me out and stunned me. Where have you been?"

"I've been here, too," the rector groaned. "I couldn't do a thing but lie flat on my face and try to protect myself against that deluge of water. It looks like it's letting up now," he added, with an upward glance.

It certainly was clearing. Through the rifts in the mist Jared could see patches of an inky sky overhead.

"Why, the comet's gone!" he shouted. "Blown its damn head off, maybe. Look, there's the sun!"

The sun's orb, looking like an enormous, flattened tangerine, appeared through the fog. But there was no sign of the huge star that had been the most conspicuous object in the firmament for three weeks past.

"I'm going home," said Jared, getting upon his knees. "Does that suit you, Phil?"

The two men struggled to their feet and looked about them. They saw the links stretching away, through the mists, but there were no longer any signs of the lake.

"Enderby, something queer's happened," said the rector, staring at his friend.

"Something damned queer," echoed Jared. "Lord, how my ears are ringing, and yet I feel kind of light-footed

—don't you? Let's get back, Phil. I guess that this game's yours."

## CHAPTER V.

## KAY'S MISSION.

AT about eight-thirty on the same morning, Kay Enderby, attired in an old dress, a little out of date, and an inexpensive little hat that she had bought with the intention of presenting to one of the maids, slipped quietly down the back staircase of the house and went out quickly through the rear entrance, bent on escaping the notice of the guards.

None of the domestics saw her. The only person who did observe the slight figure flitting from the house was a new guard, who was unacquainted with her, having been employed only for the past three days.

He was standing at the entrance of the disused garage that had been fitted up for the guards' use. He looked at Kay with interest, but only that which any normal-minded young guard might naturally feel in a young and pretty maid who was taking a stroll at that hour of the morning.

He made a movement toward her, as if proposing to enter into conversation, but Kay slipped past him, and in another minute was traversing the grounds of her father's estate, leading down to the road and the railroad station, which was less than a mile away.

Kay had not dared to get her car from the garage, and she knew that her father, haunted perpetually by the fear of her being kidnaped, had given orders that she was not to leave the grounds unescorted.

At nine o'clock the train, known as the "millionaires' special," was due to leave the station, and there was an-

other train, starting three minutes later, which carried commuters of humbler standing. One of these Kay meant to take.

She had no money with her, but since the trains of the six boroughs were all municipalized, and free, there would be nothing to pay.

She hurried along the road. Occasionally a car shot past her, but nobody recognized her in the outfit that she was wearing, and in a few minutes she was in sight of the station.

A score of cars were already drawn up outside it. Kay could see the "millionaires' special" winding its way through the cut, about a half-mile distant. There was no time to be lost. Kay quickened her pace.

She reached the station just as the whistle of the train began. It would be easy to lose herself among the crowd thronging the platform. But suddenly Kay's heart sank. Drawn up outside the station she recognized a bright maroon coupé—recognized it only too well, for she had ridden in it innumerable times, and had been proposed to in it five times.

It was Walter Ferrand's car. Walter was spending the summer at a house not far away, but, by an odd slip of thought, Kay hadn't considered the probability that he would be taking that particular train into New York.

Kay tried to swerve, but fate seemed to be against her. At that moment, Walter Ferrand, as immaculately dressed as ever, was just stepping out of the car. As Kay tried to slip past him, he turned, and recognized her immediately.

"Why, Kay!" he exclaimed. His eyes took in the girl's attire. Walter didn't know very much about women's clothes, but he knew this wasn't the Kay whom he had always been ac-

quainted with, groomed to the eyebrows, and wearing frocks that cost at least five hundred dollars, in the inflated currency of the day.

"Why, Kay, what are you doing here?" Walter asked in astonishment. "What's the trouble?"

"Trouble? There isn't any trouble," replied Kay defiantly.

"Something's the matter," responded Walter with conviction. "Tell me what it is, Kay, and let me help you. What's brought you here like—like this?"

KAY thought swiftly. She was sure that Walter wouldn't abduct her and take her home again. Could she venture to trust him?

"Kay, there's something wrong. Trust me, dear. You know I'm your best friend, don't you?"

Kay decided that she would have to take Walter into her confidence. "Well, it's about that poor fellow, Nils Ericson, who's to be sentenced this morning," she said. "I'm going in to Mineola to see Mr. Gregson, the prosecuting attorney. I'm going to tell him that Nils isn't guilty. I know he'll do something."

"Why, Kay, what do you suppose he can do?" asked Walter. "Now that the jury has brought in its verdict, the whole proceedings become automatic. The only chance lies in a reversal of the verdict by a superior court."

"Oh, Walter, tell me you believe he isn't guilty," said Kay miserably.

Walter Ferrand hadn't the slightest doubt as to the guilt of all three of the men. Nevertheless, he was deeply touched by the sight of beauty in distress.

"If you think he's innocent, that's good enough for me," he answered.

"But it's no use trying to see Gregson. He can't do a thing now."

"If you—if you're the friend you've always claimed to be, you'll come in to Mineola with me on this train," said Kay.

"But this train doesn't go to Mineola, Kay. It goes straight into New York."

Kay hadn't thought of that. All her trips to New York had been made by motor-car.

"Then how am I going to get to Mineola?" she asked.

Walter hesitated a moment. But he knew Kay. Never in her life had he known her to be deflected from her purpose.

"I tell you what I'll do," he said. "I'll run you right over in my car, if you feel you must see Gregson. But it won't do you any good, Kay. I do wish you'd give up this idea of yours."

"Let's start," said Kay.

She went round to the other side of the coupé and stepped in. After another instant of hesitation, Walter got in and swung the car around. The next, they were running along the road that went toward the county capital.

The golden dome of the Mineola courthouse came into view, the comet blazing overhead, on the horizon a reddish haze spreading up into the blue. But when they found Gregson's office they were told that he had gone into New York on business.

"But I've got to see him," said Kay. "I'm Miss Enderby, and I've come about that man, Nils Ericson, who's to be sentenced to death this morning."

As she spoke, the inner door opened and a tall man in the uniform of a police officer, with a gilt shield on his chest, stepped out. He was about fifty years of age and looked the picture of ruthless efficiency. He wore a closely

trimmed black mustache; his eyes probed Kay's relentlessly. It was evident that he had overheard her remark.

"THIS is Captain Garry, the chief of police," said the clerk.

"Miss Enderby wanted to see Mr. Gregson about—"

"Yeah, I heard," said Tom Garry. "Them three are going to be sentenced around 11.30. They'll get what's coming to them, don't worry."

It flashed through Kay's mind for the first time that the police chief didn't suspect the motive that had brought her there. Also that, if he did, he would probably do everything he could to prevent her from carrying it out.

"Can't I see the judge?" she asked.

"The judge ain't here yet. Listen, Miss Enderby, you've done your part. The jury's found them guilty, and they're going to the chair. Well, then, what's worrying you?"

"I want to see those men sentenced," said Kay desperately.

Tom Garry scowled and plucked at his mustache. He couldn't make Kay out, but he remembered that she had nearly upset the State's case as regards Ericson. What did she want? Some crazy notion, no doubt. Perhaps had the idea that she could address the judge. He hardened.

"Now, Miss Enderby, seeing three fellers sentenced to the chair ain't in a woman's line," he said. "Nope, you can't go in. I'm sorry, but that's final."

"You see, Kay, you'd better let me drive you home," said Walter Ferrand, outside the building.

Kay turned on him like a fury. "I'm going into that courtroom, Walter," she proclaimed. "A court's a public place, and they can't keep me out."

"Kay, won't you please be reason-

able?" pleaded Walter. "You can't go in and make a scene. Why, it would be in all the afternoon papers. I'm sure your father will hire a good lawyer to take the case to the Court of Appeals."

"I'm going in," said Kay. "You'd better go home."

They were arguing near the entrance to the courthouse inclosure. A crowd was swarming about them, staring up at the comet. That curious reddish haze seemed to be spreading up from the horizon. The sun, pale yellow like an enormous golden coin, seemed to have lost half its lustre, though it shone out of an apparently clear sky.

Walter saw Kay's face, white and resolute, in the strange half-twilight that was swiftly coming on. A reddish twilight through which the sun glowed still more dully, silhouetting the mobs against the courthouse and throwing their figures, the motor-cars, the trees into a strange perspective.

An awesome silence had fallen everywhere. Not a movement was discernible in the vast crowds, standing with faces upturned toward the sky. Then a woman shrieked:

"Gawd, it's the Judgment Day!"

And in an instant panic swept through the mob. Instantly it was dissolved into a fighting, screaming, trampling herd. Walter grasped Kay and began fighting his way with her, back into the protection of the building. He got her through the entrance just before it was jammed by the milling crowd.

But there was panic inside, too. White-faced clerks stood trembling in the aisles; men were shouting; women, trapped in the offices, were wailing helplessly. Kay broke from Walter and he followed her flight, calling to her in

vain, up a flight of stone steps and along a corridor.

Around the bend came another mass of fugitives, racing like stampeding cattle. A squad of police appeared behind them. Walter grasped Kay and swung her through a doorway. They sank down upon a bench inside a large room while clamor filled the corridor outside.

"Lock that door!" somebody was shouting.

Only then did Walter realize that intuition, or destiny, had brought Kay to the courtroom. Impassive in his place the judge was seated. Beneath him three men, guarded by police officers, were waiting to receive the death sentence.

**T**HOUGH it was nearly high noon, the electric lights were on.

It had grown almost dark outside, despite that blazing star, and the reddish haze seemed to be spreading inside the courtroom, too. The shouting and screaming in the corridor and about the building made the courtroom a bedlam.

But Kay heard nothing, or, rather, was conscious of nothing save the scene before her. She saw the snarling, crouching form of Antonelli, and Red Lewis, his jaws working as he chewed on a wad of gum. And she saw these two only as accessories to the plight of Nils.

She saw Nils with a shudder of fear, mingled with wonder. He stood between the two crooks, his broad shoulders straightened, his mop of fair hair swept back carelessly from his forehead. It was the look on his face that frightened Kay. It was that of a man-beast, instinct with some terrific, dormant power. She leaned forward, her eyes fixed on his face in fascination.

The judge had begun to speak, but his formal words were drowned by the noise without. And, as if aware that Kay was watching him, Nils slowly turned. For a moment his gaze swept the courtroom. Then it fixed itself on Kay's face.

He knew her. The girl whom he had seen on the witness stand, come to hear him sentenced to the chair!

The darkness was spreading in the courtroom. The electric lights were dimming to candle-power. And, as if through some optical illusion, Walter Ferrand could see only those two faces, the man's and the girl's.

Suddenly Kay was upon her feet, eyes flaming, arms outstretched.

"Nils Ericson is innocent!" she cried. "He wasn't in my father's house that night. He shall not die! You've got to listen to me!"

Tom Garry had come into the courtroom, but in the spreading obscurity he hadn't recognized Kay till she leaped to her feet. Now, face crimsoning with anger, he sprang through the cowering group that had sought for refuge in the room, shouldering them aside.

"Remove that woman!" cried the judge. But his voice sounded tremulous and thin, and now he was no more than a phantom form against the ever increasing darkness.

It happened, then, in a flash. The chained beast broke free. With a bound, Nils Ericson leaped to the courtroom floor, sweeping the police guards aside. Then he was at Kay's side and Kay was swaying toward him; and some protective instinct, stronger than fear, sent her arms around him, to hold him and to shield him.

Walter Ferrand crouched in his place, conscious of his insufficiency, his

weakness. "Kay! Kay!" he whimpered. He tried to go to her, but Tom Garry brushed past him, flinging him to the ground. The policemen who had been guarding the three prisoners were colliding with one another in the darkness. The electric lights had become mere pin-points—nothing more.

Yet Walter Ferrand could still see the faces of Nils Ericson and Kay Enderby. And that picture of the two was printed upon his brain indelibly before it was dissolved.

That dissolution was instantaneous. One moment there were the man and the girl, Tom Garry, with his pistol at Nils's head, the police officer stumbling forward; the next, everything had dissolved in crashing ruin.

## CHAPTER VI.

### OUT OF THE RUINS.

NILS ERICSON came back to consciousness with a violently aching head. He tried to put his hand up to it, and discovered that his arm was pinned. He was soaked with warm water, which was still dripping upon him, and falling with monotonous splashes everywhere. Above him was a patch of sunlight, but he was lying in darkness.

His free arm clutched something warm and pliant. It was a living human body. With his other hand he felt a woman's face and hair. And he remembered.

When ruin had fallen on the world, he had still held Kay. Together they had fallen into a bottomless abyss. He remembered Garry's roar of rage, the crack of his pistol. With his last flash of consciousness he had supposed himself shot through the brain.

The comet? Had the comet destroyed

the world? He had heard about it in jail, and seen it through the courtroom windows. His guards had jested about it. They had told him it was his only chance of escaping the chair. The world was going to fly into a million bits. Was that what had happened?

But how did it happen that he was lying there with Kay Enderby, and that they were both alive?

He looked about him. His eyes were growing accustomed to the obscurity. He guessed now that it had been an earthquake, and that he was lying amid the ruins of the overthrown courthouse at Mineola. Great masses of stone lay everywhere on all sides of him, and fallen beams. He could feel one of the beams lying across his back. He must have escaped death by a miracle.

But Kay still lived, and, straining his eyes through the gloom, Nils could see her face faintly in the obscurity. She was lying beneath him, her eyes closed, her brown hair caught back in a mass of debris. There was a gash of blood across her forehead.

Nils put his hand upon her breast. He could feel its even rise and fall. She was alive. That was all that mattered. Suddenly the furious berserk instinct came back to him again. He tensed himself where he lay; he drew his body muscles into taut cords. And with a superhuman exercise of strength he forced himself upward against the beam that imprisoned him.

He felt his muscles cracking. But the beam was moving. A great, huge beam that had supported the weight of one quarter of the courtroom building, it was moving, sliding downward. The sweat streamed down Nils's rain-drenched face. The breath panted from his lungs. One last effort—

The beam slid from his back and



toppled over with a crash upon the débris beside him. Nils was free.

He could feel the lump upon his aching head where a falling stone had struck him. He could feel the girl who still lay, encircled in his arm. He staggered up, bearing her up with him. He ached in every limb, his body was half numb, but he was free, and no bones were broken.

He swung Kay into his arms and got upon his feet. He stood, swaying, trying to get his balance. He could see much more clearly now. Overhead, above the fallen beams and stones, there was an open space, and from somewhere above the sun was shining. A long ray fell almost at Nils's feet.

Holding Kay, Nils began to scramble up the débris. In places the stones were wedged high above him. He plucked at them and sent them tumbling down. He fought them as his ancestors had fought the inanimate forces of nature. He squeezed his body through gaps that seemed almost impenetrable. But always he was careful of Kay, that no sharp edge should bruise her.

**H**E was free now. A broken flight of steps lay before him. He made his way up them, and, since the opening above him was wider, he swung Kay over his shoulder.

Panting, bleeding, Nils emerged into what had been one of the basement corridors of the courthouse. A door was in front of him, half-choked with fallen stones. With his right hand Nils plucked them aside. He staggered out into the sunlight.

His first impression was that a wholesale massacre had occurred. The court in front of the ruined building was packed with the bodies of men

who had been crushed by the falling stones, and outside these motor-cars were piled up in grotesque heaps. Across the road the buildings had fallen into utter ruin.

Everywhere was devastation, death, no living being.

A lukewarm rain was falling, partly dispersing the wisps of fog that wreathed the ruins, so that the scene wavered before Nils's eyes, now growing almost clear, now vanishing. He stumbled over the crushed and mangled bodies. And once, as he looked up, Nils saw what looked like an enormous sun, almost within arm's grasp; and then he discovered that it was the golden dome of the courthouse, perched in the ruins of the tumbled building.

Everywhere the din had been succeeded by utter silence. Not a single human being seemed to have survived. But as Nils, with Kay across his shoulder, reached the tumble of stones that had been the surrounding wall, he heard a man muttering hoarsely nearby, and stopped, waiting for the next break in the fog.

It came, and he recognized Tom Garry, the police chief. Garry was lying huddled up among the stones, his face covered with blood, and he was apparently still half-unconscious, for the efforts that he was making to disengage himself were weak and futile ones.

Nils stood looking at him, thoughts of vengeance surging through his brain. Suddenly Tom Garry recognized him, and made a new, spasmodic effort to get free. It failed, and he sank back, panting, upon the pile of débris beneath him.

"So you think you've beat the chair, do you, feller," he snarled, "because of the earthquake? Well, you'll find

out that makes no difference. You're my prisoner!"

He fumbled for his belt, but it was gone, torn from the tattered uniform, and, realizing his helplessness, Garry lay glaring at Nils.

"Well, why don't you bump me off, you dirty, murdering dog?" he snarled. "Who's that girl you got? Put her down! I'll get you yet!"

Suddenly he recognized Kay. He shouted, and struggled so fiercely that he succeeded in dislodging himself, and tumbled down the slope of broken stone, disappearing on the other side. Next moment the fog had shut down again.

With a shrug of his shoulders, Nils turned away and began striding toward the street. Some time he'd settle with Tom Garry, but for the present the score could wait. He heard Garry's frantic yells die away behind him.

Nils saw the line of motor-cars looning up in front of him. Every one of them had either been overturned or crushed by the impact of the falling stones. Nils traveled along the line in the hope of finding one that was intact, but without success. He turned the angle of the building to where another double row of cars had been parked, but here the destruction had been even worse, for the whole side of the courthouse building seemed to have dropped down bodily, burying the cars feet deep in stones and rubble. The road itself had practically disappeared.

NILS beat to and fro for a while, then gave up his search. He could see, in another lifting of the fog, that no tires could hope to negotiate that litter that filled the road.

He picked up Kay again and began clambering over the debris. He turned eastward, in the direction of his fa-

ther's old farm, without clearly understanding why. But the road to the farm ran past the Enderby estate.

Nils's ears were ringing, but the pain in his head was subsiding and he felt strangely light-footed. He wanted to run and leap, and Kay seemed no heavier than a child. Until he reached the edge of what had been Mineola, which meant a constant clambering over the ruins of the tumbled houses, he supposed that an earthquake, similar to those that had occurred in other parts of the world, had shaken down the town.

Now things looked queerer than even an earthquake could have made them look. First, Nils realized that the comet was no longer in the sky. And the sun, looking like a dull, flattened orange, far down in the west, seemed different, like an enormous harvest moon. And the landscape had changed. For in the west, beyond the chaos of tumbled ground, where Jamaica should have been, was a range of mountain peaks soaring into the sky.

Everywhere lay trees, uprooted, and the fields were pitted with huge holes, as if they had been subjected to an intense bombardment. Here and there, dipping among them, were the remnants of what had been roads.

East of Mineola great blocks of concrete, that had formed the bed of the Jericho Turnpike, were tossed up into an almost impassable barrier. Nils took to the fields beside the remnants of the road, threading his way along the ridges between the holes.

He set Kay down and looked at her. She was breathing regularly, but she was still unconscious. He examined the injury to her head, wiping away the blood that still oozed from her forehead. The bone beneath it did not seem to be fractured.

Even now, Nils had not decided where he was going. His mind was still confused, and a burning thirst tormented him. There was no water anywhere, though the lukewarm drizzle was still descending. Nils turned northward. That was the direction of his farm.

All at once he came upon a pond of water, escaping on every side above the brimming banks. He set Kay down, flattened himself upon his stomach, and drank eagerly. He made a cup of his hands and poured some of the fluid into Kay's mouth.

**S**HE stirred, she opened her eyes, she looked into Nils's face and shuddered. She knew him.

"Where am I? What has happened?" she whispered.

"The world's come to an end, I guess," Nils answered hoarsely. "Mineola's a ruin. Maybe New York's gone, too." New York was the world to Nils. If that had gone, the world had certainly been destroyed.

"They're all dead, crushed under the falling stones," Nils went on. He had forgotten Tom Garry for the moment. "You and me are the only humans left alive, I guess."

And suddenly he realized that this girl was his, that his wild dream had come true. They were alone in a world of the dead. A world for him to master. Kay saw the sombre flicker in his eyes. She cried out faintly.

"Take me home," she pleaded, "even if they're all dead. Oh, take me home! Promise me! Didn't I come to the court to-day to plead for you?"

Nils didn't answer her. Perhaps he hardly heard her. That brooding dream possessed him. He had come into his own. Kay and a dead world to be explored, dominated, whether

other human beings still remained alive or no.

But there were others. A group of six men, lurking in a patch of scrub beside the pond, watching him like wolves. Six men who seemed to have reverted to the primeval type of man, with snarling, bestial faces. Three of them were bareheaded, three wore soft hats or caps mushroomed down upon their heads. Their clothing, sodden from the rain, was stained black with mud and hung and flapped about them. Their leader signaled, and they leaped out, shouting.

"All you got!" yelled the foremost. "Come across with it, leave the girl, and scam!"

Nils sprang to meet the rush. A revolver cracked; the bullet whined past his ear. His big fists flailed mercilessly. Three of the six went down before the impact. Then Nils was in the middle of the rest, grappling with them, knocking their heads together, leaving them stunned and helpless, while the other three took flight, stumbling over the pitted ground, hawling in terror.

Nils went back and raised Kay in his arms again. Suddenly it was growing dark. A minute or two before a shaft of sunlight had pierced the fog. Now darkness was dropping from the heavens like a cloak.

The moon, which should have lit up the skies, seemed to have vanished, like the comet.

Then of a sudden a host of brilliant stars came out, lighting the dark landscape that stretched away on every side.

Kay was relapsing into unconsciousness. But, as she felt Nils's arms about her, she muttered plaintively:

"Take me home! I came—to plead for you!"

Some feeling, strange to Nils, stirred in his heart. Was it her helplessness? Something that was stronger than his desire to take her for his own. A moan came from his lips.

"Take me home. Promise me!"

"I'll—take you—home!"

She heard, and she relaxed, a dead

weight in his arms. Clasp ing her to him, Nils strode on into the night with her. And then a laugh of self-mockery broke from his lips.

He laughed bitterly into the night as he strode onward, holding Kay in his arms, and feeling her rain-splashed hair sweeping his face.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



## *Wampum, the Dutch Currency*

CONTRARY to popular belief, wampum was not originally Indian money.

The purple and white shell beads, used so extensively in Colonial times along the New England coast, in New York State, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Canada, were first manufactured by the Dutch and served as the only form of currency in the little colony of New Netherlands for over seventy years.

The reason for this was that the motherland would not allow the Dutch colonists to have any small silver currency, alleging that if silver was sent to the New World it would speedily find its way into the pockets of the English and French to the detriment of Dutch interests. As a result, the special type of shell beads were made and used not only among the Dutch themselves, but in trade with the Indians, English, and French.

These beads were made from two kinds of shell, the quahaug or hard clam and the periwinkle. The purple, or "black" wampum was the most valuable.

Laws were passed prohibiting the counterfeiting of this odd currency in horn, bone, stone, mussel shell, glass and wood.

In 1627 the Dutch sold fifty pounds' worth of the stuff to the English in Massachusetts, thereby introducing wampum to the Indians of that section of the coast. However, the English did not succeed in disposing of this amount of the shell beads to the Indians for almost two years.

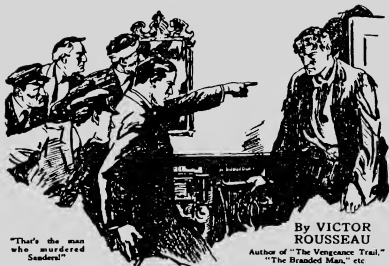
About 1770 a wampum factory was established at Pascack, Bergen County, New Jersey, by Robert Campbell. This factory flourished until well into the nineteenth century. Wampum was still in circulation as a medium of exchange among the farmers of New Jersey as late as 1844.

Now, the true purple and white wampum beads are extremely scarce. Very few private collectors have any of the genuine wampum. Glass beads, stone beads, and other shell beads are not wampum.

In time the use of wampum spread among many of the Iroquois and Algonquian tribes. They used it principally as a mnemonic reminder and to preserve accounts of treaties, deeds, etc. Belts and strings were made and used ceremonially, and one American officer in 1792 said, "To attempt to talk with an Indian without wampum is like going to a lawyer without a fee."

*Arthur Woodward.*

# World's End



"That's the man  
who murdered  
Sanders!"

By VICTOR  
ROUSSEAU

Author of "The Vengeance Trail,"  
"The Branded Man," etc.

*How will the world behave on Judgment Day? Men found out when the sun reeled across the heavens and set in the north!*

THE charge against Nils Ericson was first degree murder. Nils wasn't guilty but he knew what the verdict was going to be as he heard the judge giving the charge to the jury in the courthouse at Mineola, Long Island. The other two men on trial with Nils, Red Lewis and Paul Antonelli, had confessed, and in their confessions had implicated Nils.

The truth of the matter was that Nils, young Viking of the second generation in America, had agreed to drive the other two from New York to the Long Island estate of Jared Enderby, the financier. That was on an evening in 1942. Nils did not know that his two fares intended to rob the Enderby place, nor did he know, as he

waited outside with his cab, that two of the guards of the estate were being shot down.

However, Nils was captured with the two bandits, and was declared equally guilty. The jury returned after a short deliberation. "Guilty," was their verdict.

Nils, huge, powerful, stoical, heard it without flinching. What use to fight against injustice, anyway, when the world was so topsy-turvy—might even come to an end soon? For a strange and gigantic comet had appeared in the sky and as it swung through the heavens, dimming the light of the sun, it was causing cataclysms over the face of the earth. Volcanoes were exploding. The great faults of the earth,

such as the Rocky Mountains, were being thrust high into the air; the Pacific Coast was inundated by tidal waves.

On the day Nils was to be sentenced, Kay Enderby, daughter of the financier, who had testified in Nils's behalf, drove to the Mineola courthouse, taking along her protesting suitor, Walter Ferrand, to make a last desperate attempt to save Nils. Despite the opposition of Captain Tom Garry, chief of police, she got into the courtroom and shouted a demand for justice for the accused Viking.

Nils, seeing her threatened, broke away from his guards and sprang to her side. Garry drew his revolver to shoot Nils, and at that instant a cataclysm overwhelmed the city. It was as though an earthquake and a cloudburst struck at the same moment. Buildings collapsed, people were killed by the score. Nils dug himself out of the wreckage and rescued the unconscious girl.

*(Part two begins here.)*

## CHAPTER VII.

### HOMEWARD BOUND.

"LOOK at the sun! Look at the sun!" gasped Jared Enderby, when he and the Reverend Philip Haynes had covered about half the distance from the eleventh hole back to the clubhouse.

The two men stopped. Through the swirling mists and the warm drizzle they could see the clubhouse standing just where it had always been, silhouetted against the northern sky. But the sun was setting in the north behind it! Setting in the north, beyond Long Island Sound!

Setting at something after one

o'clock on an autumn afternoon, according to Jared Enderby's wrist-watch, which had somehow survived the cloudburst, and was still ticking away.

It was half as large again as any sun that man had ever seen. Moreover, it was setting with incredible swiftness, almost leaping through the heavens.

"Enderby," said the rector solemnly, "it is the Judgment Day."

"We'd best get back to the clubhouse as quick as we can," answered Jared practically. If the rector was correct, he felt that he would somehow prefer to hear the blast of doom within four walls, in a familiar place.

The sun was half-way down when the two men came to the building. Nothing seemed to have changed here. The flags were even fluttering in the first two holes. There were no signs of the destruction that the two had anticipated.

A figure came running toward them and evolved into the chauffeur, Jenkins.

"Mr. Enderby! Thank Heaven you're safe!" he exclaimed. "I thought you might have been in the shelter on the ninth hole. I've been looking for you everywhere."

"What's happened, Jenkins?" asked Jared.

"Sort of an earthquake, sir, I guess. And the car won't start, sir. None of the cars will. Just a splutter or two, that's all. But the comet's gone, Mr. Enderby, the comet's gone!"

"Now take it easy, Jenkins," answered the financier. But he felt eerie. His body and limbs had that same sensation of lightness, while the ringing in his ears was as bad as ever. "See what you can do about the car, and we'll get home. I hope nothing's happened there."

"Look! Look!" gasped the rector.

The sun had dipped beneath the horizon. An immense black shadow extended itself, with appalling swiftness, toward them. It swallowed them, and the whole face of the land was plunged into instant darkness, save for a few stars, peering through the fog, which appeared as instantaneously as if a celestial switch had been turned.

INSIDE the clubhouse a rain-soaked group of players and caddies was gathered about a pallid fire, peering into each other's faces by the light of some dozen candles. The radio had been turned on, and was emitting a wild, staccato screeching.

"Oh, turn the damn thing off!" exclaimed one of the men.

"Listen! There's some one trying to get through!" exclaimed Morgan Filson, an imposing figure in Wall Street, but now looking merely one of the rain-soaked, steaming group, in his soggy linen plus-fours. "Didn't you hear the word 'Earth'?"

They listened again, but only the wild screech of the static came to them. Somebody snapped the switch.

"Hello, Enderby!" exclaimed Morgan Filson. "Hello, rector! Caught in that cloudburst?"

"I hope it was only a cloudburst," said Jared. "Lord, how my ears are ringing!"

"Same here," said Filson and Will Barry, the latter the business manager for a group of popular magazines.

"Did you see anything strange about the sunset?" asked Jared.

"Went out in a flash," answered Filson. "I guess it's one of those tropical storms strayed up this way."

"It set in the north," said Jared.

"Oh, come, Enderby, don't go too strong," protested Filson. "What I

want to know is, what's the matter with the cars. Not one of them will start."

"My guess," said Will Barry, "is that the comet caused the Earth to shift the plane of its ecliptic."

"Would that stop the cars, and make the sun set at twenty minutes after one?" Jared demanded. "How do we know it's ever going to rise again?" he cried, with sudden vehemence that was almost hysteria. "I'm going home. God knows what I'll find there! Jenkins, see if you can't get the car to start. Maybe there's water in the carburetor."

"Try the radio again," suggested Will Barry, as Jenkins went out into the rain.

Again that unearthly shrieking filled the clubhouse. They listened, trying to catch some signs of the human voice. Once or twice it did seem that somebody was at the transmitting end, trying to speak, but not a word could be distinguished for sure.

"Damn the radio!" shouted Jared suddenly. "I'm going home, if I have to walk. Best come along, Phil," he addressed the rector.

"I'll try it with you," said Morgan Filson, whose place was about a mile from Jared's.

The three plunged out into the darkness and the steady downpour. "Best give it up, Jenkins," shouted Jared. "We're walking home."

"Can't do it in this blackness," shivered Filson, stopping at the edge of the road.

And, even as he spoke, suddenly, swiftly, day broke in its fullness, and the sun appeared, an enormous ball spinning swiftly up from the southern horizon.

It mounted with prodigious speed, a huge, appalling sun, gleaming

through the heavy mists like a great orange in the sky. The temperature began rising swiftly.

**B**EHIND them the three men heard shouting from the clubhouse, but they plunged forward resolutely through the mists.

"That's not the east, Filson," said Jared, pointing to the sun.

Morgan Filson shook his head, hopelessly nonplussed. Then he pointed to a motor-car, stranded by the roadside. A few yards farther on there was another. Whatever had happened had obviously affected the engines of all cars simultaneously.

The three tramped on in silence, only a few yards of the road discernible before them in the white fog. The sun was only a bright patch overhead. But by the time they reached the village it was already at the zenith.

Two trains were stalled on the tracks just outside the station. Here and there were gaps and bulges in the concrete road. But the village was still standing, though it appeared quite deserted.

Then the three heard the sound of voices, singing. It came from the little community church in the center of the village. The rector stopped.

"Nearer, My God, to Thee!" he cried. "I should have been with my own people too. The bridegroom cometh like a thief in the night—and finds me knocking a foolish ball around the links. God forgive me!"

He waved his arms wildly and started running along a road that branched off to the right. Filson and Jared stood watching him till the fog closed about him.

"That's my way too," said Morgan Filson. "I hope everything will be all right with you, Enderby."

"The same to you," answered Jared. "God, look at that sun!"

The sun was nearly half-way toward the horizon, though it could have been little more than half an hour since its rising. It was descending with a speed that the eye could follow.

"I'm crazy," said Jared.

He heard footsteps behind him and turned, expecting to see Morgan Filson, but it was Jenkins.

"It's no use, Mr. Enderby, I can't start her," the chauffeur panted. "Something's happened, sir, bigger than we know. Look! Look at them birds!"

A dozen large birds were soaring about twenty feet from the ground, skimming the wind like eagles. But they were barnyard chickens!

Jenkins picked up a stone and flung it. It flew from his hand like an arrow and disappeared into the mists. The two men stared at one another in swift concern.

"Jenkins, we're both crazy," whispered Jared hoarsely.

Black against the sun's red orb, the Enderby house came into view.

"Well, that looks good to me," said Jared. "Hurry, before it gets dark again."

The two men plodded up the road. They were almost at the entrance to the grounds when the sun's rim vanished. There followed instant darkness.

**I**T was years since Jared Enderby had sprinted, but he did so now.

Panting, he jog-trotted up to the entrance pillars, with Jenkins following close behind him, to be halted peremptorily by a figure, revolver in hand. It was one of the guards.

"I'm Mr. Enderby," shouted Jared.

"I'm sorry, sir. We've been having



quite a time here, sir. We tried to get you, but the cars won't—"

"Where's Miss Kay?"

"She went out early this morning, sir. I mean, yesterday. I mean—"

The man was talking wildly. Jared caught him by the shoulder. "You mean to say you let her get away?" he shouted.

"She went out before breakfast. Brown, the new man, saw her, but he thought she was one of the maids."

"Which way did she go?"

"Down the road toward the station, sir. Mr. Ferrand's here. He said he picked her up and drove her into Mineola, and then the earthquake and everything—"

Jared flung the guard from him and raced up the drive toward the house. Armed guards were at the doors. Behind them, moving silhouettes against the faint gleam of candles, were the employees and a huddle of squawking maids, filling the hall. Jared burst into the midst of them.

"Miss Kay not back?" he yelled. "Where's Mr. Ferrand?"

Upstairs the radio was squealing frantically. In the hall an excited clamor arose at Jared's appearance. A white shirt-front gleamed in the candle-light, and above it appeared the face of Pompsen, the English butler.

"Mr. Ferrand is upstairs, sir. He doesn't seem quite—if I might so—responsible, sir."

But Walter Ferrand was already in sight, swaying along the hall, his slight figure obscured in one of Jared Enderby's suits, which was several sizes too large for him. His face and hair were still plastered with mud, and his eyes glittered wildly.

"I couldn't find her," he raved. "She fell down into the ruins after the earthquake. I only escaped by a

miracle. She's dead— Oh, God, she's dead!"

He began weeping drunkenly. "It's terrible, it's terrible!" he moaned, wholly unstrung.

Jared seized the young man by the shoulders and shook him violently. "You took her away, and you've come back without her!" he shouted. "Why didn't you die too? You're coming back with me to find her. Get horses from the stables and saddle them at once, all you can find," he cried to the employees. "We'll ride together. Ten thousand dollars for the man who finds Miss Kay!"

There was an instant stir and bustle. Men began running in all directions. Then of a sudden the crack of a revolver sounded outside, and a guard shouted in the darkness.

A human figure was coming toward the house, looking like that of a giant against the uncertain background of the night. Behind it ran two gibbering guards.

They saw it was a tall figure, with something slung across its shoulder. A rug? A human form? A woman's body, just discernible in the faint light of the candles in the hall.

And it was thus that Nils Ericson brought Kay Enderby back to her home. Nils, towering above the milling crowd, with Kay unconscious in his arms, her face against his shoulder, and her hair sweeping backward. Kay, drenched and mud-bespattered, lying there limp and helpless.

Nils strode into the hall, saw a sofa there, and laid Kay down. He turned. He saw the threatening, closing circle and his lips twitched momentarily in a derisive smile.

Instinctively, all drew back again from that huge figure, though it was apparently unarmed. Black with mud,

ragged, bleeding, it yet seemed to radiate a power that made it unassailable.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A BROKEN WORLD.

JARED ran to his daughter's side and bent over her. "She's alive!" he shouted. "Thank God that she's alive!"

Out of the press broke Walter Ferrand, his face distorted with rage. "That's the man who murdered Sanders and Everett!" he shouted, pointing at Nils. "I saw him sentenced to death this morning—I mean yesterday—I mean—hold him!"

And, foaming and slobbering, he stood swaying on the replica of the Ispahan prayer-rug, shouting incoherently to the guards.

Until that moment none of the guards had recognized in Nils one of the three men who had been tried for the murder of their two companions, even though most of them had testified at the trial. Now recognition was immediate. In another moment Nils would have dropped, riddled with bullets. But Jared Enderby sprang forward from his daughter's side.

"Leave him alone!" he shouted. "He brought Kay back after you had deserted her, Ferrand!"

Nils looked about him, that wry smile still twisting his lips. Why had he brought her here, when she had been his for the taking? And the struggle in his own soul, during those hours when he had carried her through the darkness, had been mightier than any physical battle that he could have envisaged.

He glared about him, bewildered by a problem that he could not solve. And, as always when baffled, he had

the impulse toward immediate action, to snatch Kay up again and fight his way out with her in his arms.

None of those in the hall could have divined the struggle in the soul of this blond-headed giant, plastered with mud and clay, and looking as if he might have been one of those primeval beings fashioned out of the soil, according to tribal mythology.

"You're not going to let him get away, are you?" cried Walter Ferrand in petulant fury.

"He brought Kay home," said Jared. He recognized Nils, for he had escorted his wife to the court when she gave her evidence. He had never known whether she or Kay had been right in their conflicting versions, and he hadn't been interested. He had wanted Nils sent to the chair on principle, but he must give him a chance now.

He turned to him. "You'd better make yourself scarce while you've got the chance," he said. "I'll give you a break till the police get here. Take Miss Kay to her room!" he ordered two of the maids.

"Police?" shouted a guard. "There ain't no police. The end of the world has come!"

The squealing of the radio in the room above had suddenly ceased. Then sounded a voice, speaking clear and precise English, and resounding through the house.

"This is WPRQ broadcasting," it enunciated. "We've got the static under control. Listen in, everybody!"

Instantly there was a wild stampede up the stairs to the drawing room above. Nils was forgotten. Guards and maids together rushed up in the wake of Jared, who had been assisting one of the women with his daughter. They laid her down upon a couch

in the drawing room and Jared ran to the radio.

The voice began, broke off in a wild crescendo of squeals and whines, then came a sudden silence, followed by a low, musical hum.

"LISTEN in—listen in—listen in, everybody," came the voice again. "This is Charles Ridgway, late of Cambridge University, speaking. Under the attraction of the sun and comet a large fragment of Earth has broken away and formed a supplementary moon. We are now inhabiting that moon. We are an irregularly shaped body within the solar system, probably between five hundred thousand and a million miles from Earth.

"How large a body has broken away, it is not yet possible to determine, but it is probably about one-third, to judge from the lessening of gravity. This is counterbalanced by the fact that the greater part of Earth's atmosphere has been torn away with us.

"We are living under a pressure of three to four atmospheres, or something like sixty pounds to the square inch. On this account, water will no longer reach the boiling point under ordinary conditions, petrol and air will not vaporize in the internal combustion engine, cars cannot be run, airplanes are helpless."

"You got that, Jenkins?" cried Jared, amid the profound silence that had fallen. "Where are those horses?"

"We have now," the voice went on, "a two hour periodicity of our irregularly shaped moon on its axis. It is likely that our momentum will result in a shortening of this periodicity. We shall adjust ourselves to this change.

"There is the possibility that still

another moon will be thrown off before the transformation is complete. But so far as we are concerned, the comet has done its worst. There is not likely to be any cleavage on Long Island, though there may be tidal inundations. The matter is being studied. In another moment I shall give place to—"

"What's he saying? What's it all about?" asked one of the guards.

"He says," announced Jared solemnly, "that we are now only a portion of the Earth we knew. We have become a separate planet in the solar system."

He clapped his hand to his forehead. "My wife!" he shouted. "My wife! I—I'd forgotten about her! Suppose South Carolina isn't on our planet any more!"

"What he omits to say," observed the severe voice of the butler, Pompsion, "is what's happened to England."

"Listen in everybody," sounded another voice. "By order of the Executive Committee. This is Doctor Truebody speaking, ear, eye, nose and throat specialist, of Freeport. Consulting hours, two to four and after seven, or by appointment. The triple atmospheric pressure upon the eardrums and Eustachian passages is likely to produce total deafness in persons susceptible to colds and catarrh, until they have adapted themselves to the change.

"Inflate your ear-passages by holding the nose and blowing vigorously until you feel the passages distended. Do this once an hour at least, until accustomed to the change."

Three or four of those in the room began to try the experiment.

"I shall now give place to Mr. William Flannings, of the Jamaica Trust, Loan and Mortgage Association," the voice continued.

"Bill Hannings?" shouted Jared. "What the devil's he doing over there?"

"Attention, please, everybody," came a rich, booming, and slightly unctuous voice from the loudspeaker. "This is President Hannings, of the Jamaica Trust, Loan and Mortgage Association, speaking. I have been requested to take charge of the provisional government for Long Island that is being formed at Hempstead. I have accepted the duties of President, and our government is already functioning."

JARED sat down heavily in his chair. "Bill Hannings, eh?" he muttered.

"So that's his little game! Not if I know it Jenkins!"

He turned to the chauffeur, who frequently acted for him in a semi-secretarial capacity. "Ring up 900 quick," he ordered. "That's Mr. Morgan Filson."

"The telephone ain't working, boss," one of the guards vouchsafed. "Been out of order since the storm this afternoon—I mean since yesterday."

Jared glared about him like a man who has come to his wits' end. The smooth and unctuous voice was still speaking through the loudspeaker. Jared pulled his chair up again into the midst of the crowd, and listened.

"My personal message to all who are fortunate enough to hear me," went on the voice, "is to stay quietly in your homes and have confidence in the government. The committee which I have formed consists of some of our most prominent business men, with whom you have been proud to be associated in the past, in whose integrity you have implicit confidence; men of your own community, toward whom your hearts go out in trust—"

"Damn shyster!" Jared snarled.

"Supplies of food are being collected, and will be distributed just as soon as the boundaries of our jurisdiction can be ascertained. At present we have not been able to get in touch with any place west of Jamaica, and it is feared that New York is in ruins."

"Stay in your homes and barricade them. It is possible that gangsters and marauders may try to take advantage of our situation to plunder and burglarize. Show such men no mercy. I personally absolve you from all responsibility. Captain Tom Garry, of the Mineola police, is raising a force of volunteers. There will be half-hour radio bulletins until further notice."

"And now I shall give place for a few moments to the Reverend Sampson Small, of the Garden City Cathedral, who will ask you all to join with him in a prayer of thanksgiving—"

Jared rose to his feet. "Bill Hannings, huh?" he shouted. "How about those horses? We're riding into Hempstead. I'll show him!"

"Attaboy!" laughed one of the guards. It was a significant word. It symbolized the crumbling of Jared Enderby's own little feudal structure.

A guard came running up the stairs. "The village is on fire!" he yelled.

Crowding down the stairs to the open door, they could all see the reflection of the flames upon the wavering wall of fog. Then from a dozen places in the valley beneath, spires of strangely pallid flame were seen shooting upward.

Shouts were heard without. A figure appeared, running, gasped, and collapsed heavily at Jared's feet. It was that of a middle-aged man. Two others broke into the light cast by the candles, those of a man and woman, drenched and mud-bespattered, with

the look of hunted animals in their eyes.

"They're coming," gasped the man. "I'm Coonick, of the drug-and-beer store. They're looting, burning, murdering, carrying off the women. Gangs from New York. God, they shot my clerk dead before my eyes! They've fired the village. They're coming this way!"

A woman had begun to scream shrilly somewhere in the outer darkness. Now more figures appeared running, a dozen or so of them, young men and old, a woman carrying a child and holding another by the hand; a young man, carrying on his shoulders an old man, whose arms and legs drooped as if they were paralyzed.

"Help me! Save me!" the woman shrilled.

"Get back!" ordered Jared. "Let them in! Make way for them! Where are those gangsters? Get ready, men!" he addressed the guards.

His voice had taken on a tone of command that it had never had before.

"They're coming, Mr. Enderby, and they've all got guns!" panted Coonick.

And, as he spoke, there came another rush out of the darkness.

## CHAPTER IX.

"I'M COMING BACK!"

NO fugitives these, but a swarm of men, dim figures barely perceptible in the fog whose very postures, nevertheless, betrayed them for what they were. They halted.

"Enderby!" a voice shouted. "Enderby!"

"I'm here," said Jared. "You fellows keep your distance. Now, who the devil are you, and what d'you want?"

"We want everything you got, that's what we want," the speaker snarled. "The world's come to an end, and we mean to hit the high spots before we're wiped out—see? Come on, you bums, give them the rush!" he shouted to his followers.

A yelling crowd surged forward. Revolvers barked. But simultaneously there came the rattling discharge of the guards' automatic pistols. Yells followed, and the attackers disappeared again in the fog and darkness.

"Give them some more!" shouted Jared. He was exposing himself fearlessly among the guards. He waved his arms and shouted; he seemed transformed. "Give it to them, the murderous thugs! Shoot them down!" he cried.

Derisive yells answered him. The force that had attacked seemed to be only the advance guard, for now the cries came from all directions. In the valley beneath, the spires of fire from the burning village were shooting higher. Faint cries, like those of trapped animals, came out of the distance.

"Follow them up!" cried Jared.

Another volley from the guards rattled into the darkness, and still another. But the flashes of flame from the guards' automatics served only to draw the fire from their attackers, and bullets were impinging against the stucco front of the house, and snarling past Jared's head.

One of the guards came up. "Could you hold them off for a couple minutes by palavering with them, boss," he asked, "while the boys run back to the guardhouse for some more cartridges?"

"All right," said Jared. "Hurry!" The yells were growing more insistent, and, though nothing was visible, there

was the sense of an impending rush. Jared stepped forward.

"Listen to me!" he shouted. "I'm ready to talk to any man who'll step forward with his hands up. I guess you don't know what you're doing."

Hoots of derision answered him. "Come on, buns," shouted the leader of the mob. "They ain't got no more ammo, and he's trying to stall. Rush them! They're finished now!"

Jared leaped back as the mob came surging forward. The guards were running back from their quarters, jamming cartridges into their auto-matics.

But it was nine standing off at least forty, and the mob was wielding crowbars and hammers picked up in garages. Iron rang upon pistol butts. A guard went down stunned, another, and another. The six that remained retreated to the entrance, with Jared in their midst; behind them the milling crowd of screaming maids, and menservants snatching up chairs for weapons.

A sidecut on the head sent Jared staggering against a great stone pot of petunias. For a moment he felt unconsciousness descending on him.

And then, out of the house, a mighty figure sprang. It was Nils Ericson.

Dazed by the fierce conflict that had raged within him, he had remained while the guards rushed upstairs to listen to the radio announcement, and in the subsequent confusion he had remained unnoticed in a corner of the hall, hardly aware of his surroundings. Now the sounds of conflict had aroused him, and awakened him from the trance into which he had fallen.

Nils burst through the press, and in his hand was one of the long medieval swords that had hung in the hall. As the guards recoiled he burst through

their midst and a great shout broke from his lips.

SO might his ancestors, centuries before, have shouted when they rushed into battle against their Saxon foes. The sword swung in a wide, sweeping arc, a hiss that ended in a thud, and the sound of something falling.

The man it struck happened to be Paul Antonelli, who had escaped from the wreckage of the courthouse at Mineola, and had led the crowd of plunderers in revenge against Jared Enderby's house. The sword struck the gangster fairly on the nape of the neck, and no headsman in olden times had ever dealt a neater, surer blow. The lifeless body tumbled to the ground.

Then, with a wilder cry, Nils was amid the mob. One or two futile bullets passed harmlessly by his head; but, after the first moment, there was no chance of shooting.

Jared, groaning his way back to fuller consciousness, saw that berserk rush, and heard the battle cries that broke from Nils's throat as, single-handed, he engaged the mob. The great sword rose and fell, and the crowd fled in panic, leaving the lawn strewn with dead and dying, and the injured, crawling away through the darkness in a trail of blood.

The guards, taken aback by Nils's sudden reappearance, had regained their wits. They were pouring lead into the mob of frightened fugitives. And then, suddenly, with appalling swiftness, the darkness lifted.

One moment there was only the faint light of the candles inside the hall; the next, the orb of the sun had appeared in the south, looming blood-red through the swirling mists.

Long shafts of light spread over the wide lawns of Jared Enderby's house, showing the bodies of the dead that lay in a narrow circle before the entrance, and the wounded, moaning like stricken dogs, as they crawled away. The three guards who had been struck down had regained their feet, and were staggering confusedly toward the entrance. From within the house there rang out the occasional frightened squeal of a maid. But there was no sign of the marauders.

The guards closed about Jared. "You hurt, boss?" asked Jenkins.

"No, just a side-swipe, I guess," Jared answered.

He wasn't looking at the chauffeur. He was looking, like the guards, at that figure standing alone upon the lawn. Black against the radiance of the rising orb, the form of Nils Ericson seemed enlarged to heroic size. Nils leaned upon his sword, frowning down at the dead men who lay scattered about him.

HE turned. He was coming back into the house now, trailing his dripping sword, and there was none but shrank and gave place to him. He walked like a man in a dream. Jared moved toward him.

"You've saved us," he said, "and we owe you a whole lot. We—"

Nils didn't seem to hear him. He was still moving like a sleepwalker. Into the house he passed, and then his eyes seemed to catch the two suits of armor and the weapons that hung above them. He had made a movement as if to replace the sword; instead, he lifted down one of the helmets and placed it upon his head. Next, as if moved by some remembrance, he unfastened one of the breastpieces and strapped it on.

Jared and the guards had followed him inside, but no one spoke or moved. Standing there, Nils might have been the reincarnation of one of the dead warriors who had worn that armor, which seemed to fit him exactly.

He raised his eyes. Then a muttered expletive came from Jared's lips. For, standing on the gallery above, which overlooked the hall, was Kay, motionless, her eyes fixed upon the scene below. Upon Nils Ericson, as his on hers.

Those two motionless and mute figures might have been actors in some play, the guards and Jared and the maids the spectators. Time passed; there was no speech nor movement. Only the man and the woman, looking at each other.

Then slowly Nils raised his left arm, while he leaned upon his sword.

"I'm coming back," he said in a whisper that seemed, low though it was, to fill the hall. "I'm coming back—for you!"

Then he turned and strode away out of the hall, the armor clanking about his shoulders. In another moment the fog had swallowed him. For an instant his figure appeared again, a shadow against the dull orb of the sun. And he was gone.

Walter Ferrand was the first to speak. He looked at the little trail of red that the sword had left upon the floor, and his voice was high and tremulous.

"You've let him get away!" he cried. "That man's a murderer. Don't you understand? He was sentenced to the chair! Catch him before he makes his getaway!"

"Aw, you're all wet, buddy," jeered one of the guards. "Catch him yourself!"

"It seems to me," said the butler,

Pompton, in his austere voice, "that that fellow deserves a vote of thanks for what he's done to-night. He saved us all."

"You're right!" cried Jared. "He saved us, and he brought Kay home. Go get those horses. Quick, now. We're riding into Hempstead. Hurry! We've got to get there before the sun goes down again."

The attendants hustled out of the door. "How about the women, sir?" asked Jenkins. "We can't leave them here. Those gangsters may come back. And there ain't enough horses."

"We'll take them with us somehow."

"How about harnessing them four plow-horses to the cars?" suggested Jenkins. "The women could ride in them."

"That's the idea!" cried Jared. "But hurry, Jenkins, hurry!"

## CHAPTER X.

### JARED'S COUP.

THE procession moved at less than four miles an hour. Jared Enderby and Walter Ferrand rode at the head, with the mounted guards behind them. Following came the horse-drawn motor-cars, in which were Kay and the maids; while behind these, limiting the pace of the whole, came the rest of the servants, and the fugitives from the village, afoot.

A half-mile from the house a band of men came into view through the perpetual fogs. And perhaps for the first time since the Revolutionary War did two armed bodies of men halt and finger weapons, and glare at one another on a Long Island road.

Then a man stepped forward. "I'm Morgan Filson. That you, En-

derby?" he called. "We're going into Hempstead. If you and I are of a mind, we'll go together."

He walked up to Jared. "Give me a horse," he said. "I'll ride with you. I guess we can go with each other."

"I guess so too," replied Enderby with a frozen smile. "That piker!"

"Your diagnosis is singularly apt," returned the other. He mounted the horse from which one of the guards had rather sulkily descended, at Jared's order. "Listen, Enderby," he said. "When I take orders from Bill Hannings, I'll go to work as a twenty-dollar clerk again."

The two bodies coalesced. Side by side, at the head of the procession, rode Jared and Morgan Filson, two feudal barons deep in conference.

The village was an empty, blazing ruin. There were no signs of life in it. But, beyond its borders, the country looked much as it always had. It was very difficult to realize that a world catastrophe had happened, that the very land on which they traveled was no longer a part of Mother Earth.

There was not a man in the procession but was struggling to convince himself that he was not dreaming.

The huge sun was climbing up the sky. It moved as perceptibly as the hands of a clock. It shone out of a vortex formed by the mists, moving across the heavens from south to north. Now and again a farm house loomed out of the opaque, white curtain on either side of the road, but it appeared deserted. Once a White Leghorn hen came soaring over the horses' heads and dropped, clucking, on the turf bordering the highway. That seemed almost more grotesque than the huge, misdirected sun.

Walter Ferrand fell back and rode beside the car in which Kay was



seated. Her eyes were open, but her face was deathly white. When he called her name, she looked at him as if she did not know him.

"We'll be all right soon, Kay," said Walter, with an air of jaunty bravado. He felt like a cavalier on horseback, and he had forgotten that he was wearing a suit several sizes too big for him.

"What's happened?" whispered Kay. "Was it an earthquake?"

"Yes, an earthquake," answered Walter. "But the comet's gone, and everything will be all right now. You mustn't be afraid. We're going into Hempstead for a while."

"And—Nils Ericson?" Kay queried.

"He got away," said Walter, his lips contorted in a snarl. "Never mind that fellow, Kay. We've got you to think of. He—didn't harm you?"

"No, he was—kind to me," answered Kay.

She leaned back in the car and closed her eyes. She knew more than Walter supposed. She had listened to the chatter of the maids. But she hadn't quite taken it all in. And still it seemed to her that she was being carried in Nils's arms through a night of terror.

And still she saw Nils as he had stood in the hall, looking up at her.

The mists were lowering. A drenching warm rain was beginning to fall.

THE full horrors of the cataclysm became more and more apparent as they neared their destination, fighting against the huge sun, already dipping toward the north. On each side of the road appeared burned houses, and now and again they came upon a human body, lying prone in the slime.

Forms came cringing out of the fog, wailing, pitiful, rain-drenched, mud-

smearcd objects that had once been men and women. There were a half-dozen at the end of a line of burned out houses, still smouldering, and sending out coils of greasy smoke. They came by twos and threes, or singly, women with screaming children, crawling up from the ditches beside the road, men with the look of beaten dogs in their eyes.

"Come along, folks," called Jared. "You're safe here! Round them up!" he ordered the guards. He spoke to Morgan Filson. "Bill Hannings!" he chuckled, and Morgan Filson grinned.

And insensibly both Jared Enderby and Morgan Filson seemed to have changed. The two middle-aged men were sitting more alertly in their saddles, their eyes glanced keenly through the fog; there was something suggestive of the buccaneer about them.

"Halt!" shouted Jared suddenly, reining in. "You men—"

The guards gathered about him and his companion. Jared spoke shortly and to the point. He took a revolver from one of the men. They closed in more narrowly, unreal, phantasmal in the fog. There was silence, then a man laughed.

"You said it, boss!" he chuckled.

"Get on, then!" shouted Jared. "Two or three of you go back and hustle that crowd along. We've got to make it by sunset."

He pointed to the dim orb of the sun, which was already half-way down in the west.

A sudden lifting of the fog showed that they were beside the flying fields, which were dotted with planes that had evidently been dragged out of their hangars and had refused to fly. But there was no sight of human beings, though a woman was screeching somewhere, a thin, piercing, hopeless cry.

A dog rushed snapping past and vanished. And a man's groans came faintly from the right. But the road swung to the left—and ended in a great heap of tumbled ground.

They had reached the sharply defined eastern edge of the region that had been devastated by the earthquake. The houses were mere heaps of tumbled ruins. Huge holes, like lunar craters, pitted the ground. Gas stations lay on their sides, with the red cylinders of pumps looming up out of the debris. Hot dog stands seemed to have been picked up and tossed bodily into the fields. Overturned motor cars littered the terrain.

The procession struck off across the fields. The mists were creeping in again, the sun was very low. They were somewhere between Hempstead and Garden City. The cars that contained the women stuck in the morass that had been the Hempstead Plains, and the straining of the horses only embedded them more deeply.

Jared drove his horse back. "Get the women out!" he ordered. "Kay, are you all right?"

Kay stepped out, still bewildered. Her father ordered one of the guards down from his horse.

"Walter, you'll bring on the women," he told Ferrand. "Where's Jenkins?"

"Right on the job, sir," answered the chauffeur, riding up.

"You take three of the guards and help Mr. Ferrand bring Miss Kay and the women into Hempstead. We'll be waiting for you there. Come on, the rest of you!" he ordered.

The maids began to chatter. Jared, ignoring them, galloped back to Morgan Filson. Accompanied by about a dozen men, the two set off at a canter across the fields. The sun was low.

"We'll be in luck if we get in before it's dark," Jared remarked.

THEY were in Hempstead by the time the sun's rim touched the horizon. The line of the earthquake shock was as clearly defined as if it had been drawn with a ruler. On one side of the road were the tumbled houses, on the other were no signs of devastation at all. The road appeared again, with only an occasional upthrust block of cement marking the irregular line of the catastrophe. The fog was growing thicker.

Jared swung round in his stirrups and pointed forward, shouting inarticulately. He kicked his horse furiously, and it shot ahead, while the little force behind him dashed along the road at a wild gallop.

That was the precise moment when all that had been Jared Enderby went to pieces. All of a lifetime's well-grooved habits broke, and were succeeded by the subconscious, underlying personality, of whose existence he had not even been aware.

It was that personality which had made him the ruthless force that he had become in Wall Street. He had smashed his way to financial power in total ignorance of the well-springs of his own character. At that exact moment the surface personality, the peaceful, golf-playing, middle-aged gentleman vanished from the scene forever.

The street was jammed with people, and their united cries, prayers, and shouts blended in a wild discord. They looked like a crowd of troglodytes, whose clothes, plastered with mud, seemed one with their bodies. A frenzied mob, milling about the town hall, drifting aimlessly to this side and that like a mass of jelly in a tilted bowl. In front of the town hall a half-dozen

policemen, looking themselves hardly more human than the mob, was trying to prevent the crowd from swarming into the building.

Everywhere were scattered goods, taken from stores and houses, the contents of grocers' shops, of hardware shops, of furniture shops; beds, rugs, tables, chairs, cooking utensils. Everywhere were stalled motor cars, and these, in one place, had been heaped up to form a barricade.

There had been fighting, too, for over this barricade a dozen bodies hung in horribly unnatural postures. Here and there a dead man lay in the roadway. The great red ball, dipping into the horizon, threw long shafts of lurid light over the scene.

Jared rose in his stirrups as the mob surged about the horses. "Ride them down!" he shouted. "Ride them down to hell!"

With Jared Enderby and Morgan Filson in the lead, the little force dashed forward, knocking down men and women remorselessly. Right through the heart of the milling throng they drove straight to the town hall.

They leaped from their horses and rushed into the building, pushing aside the half-dozen men in stained and tattered policemen's uniforms who stood in the entrance.

In a large room, six men were seated at a table. The man who occupied the head looked to be in his late fifties. He wore an old-fashioned stiff collar, considerably wilted, and a black tailed coat, encrusted with mud, once known as a "cutaway." White whiskers adorned his ruddy and benevolent face.

Each of the five others was a little younger. They were, in contrast, clean-shaven, each of them wore pince-nez, and each had that kind of visage that inspires immediate trust when

seen behind the grille of a bank cage, or through the open door of a mortgage company's president's office. In short, they were leading citizens.

There were some dozen men about them, wearing nondescript policemen's uniforms, or parts of uniforms, and each had a revolver bulging at his belt. Among them was a man displaying a gold badge upon his breast, standing close to the gentleman with the white whiskers. It was, in fact, Tom Garry, chief of the Mineola police force.

He started back at the sudden inrush and laid his hand upon the butt of the revolver at his belt. In a trice Morgan Filson had covered him with a revolver.

It was Jared Enderby who covered the gentleman with the white whiskers, while, before the drawn weapons of the guards, the police shrank back, glancing tremulously toward Tom Garry. As for the five members of the committee, they half rose in their chairs and then subsided, while babbling protests died upon their lips.

"Like your job, Bill Hannings?" Jared queried ironically of the white-whiskered gentleman.

"Enderby! Thank God you've come! And Mr. Filson! We want you on our committee. We've been waiting for you."

"Oh, yeah?" asked Jared.

And that was a phrase that had never passed Jared Enderby's lips before. He had not even been aware that he was acquainted with it. But he was no longer the old Jared Enderby.

"Yeah?" asked Jared. "You thought that we'd take jobs under you, you quaint little piker, did you? Well, get out of here, the whole pack of you! You're through. We're running this show!"

"But—but—" stammered Hannings.

He glanced in wild appeal at Tom Garry. But Garry had already sized up the situation.

"I guess that goes," he said. "Hannings, you're through!"

Bill Hannings and the other members of the committee sprang to their feet, dazed by the sudden transformation. Hannings stuttered inarticulately. But at that moment the light in the room began to fade. The sun had set.

And suddenly, through the swiftly falling darkness, there came an oath and a pistol shot. One of the guards reeled, cursing, back from the door. In the corridor outside there was a scuffle of shouting men. What happened next was sheer panic.

"Hold him!" shouted Jared, pointing his pistol muzzle at Hannings's head. "Don't let him get away!"

One of the guards behind misunderstood, aimed, and fired. Hannings dropped, shot through the brain. Instantly the crack of firearms followed, and flashes of fire wove back and forth through the room, while men dropped, cursing and groaning with agony.

There came a wild rush from without, met by the guards with a leaden hail. Stampede; and, in the faint afterglow of the dead daylight, Jared Enderby was master of the situation.

He heard his own voice shouting through the darkness: "My daughter! Get my daughter!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### TO "CET" NILS.

THREE periods of daylight had elapsed since Jared Enderby's seizure of power; actually but twelve hours. The sun had risen and set, risen and set, rushing with bewil-

dering speed across the dark blue wilderness of the sky.

The first night had been one of chaos and darkness. It had been impossible to start the dynamos in the power station, since neither steam nor internal combustion engines could be made to operate under the triple atmospheric pressure. But periodically Ridgway broadcast from the south shore station. How he had conquered the all-pervading static was unknown, since there was no longer physical communication with him. Loudspeakers, operated by batteries, blared forth his messages everywhere in Hempstead.

Candles were used to light the headquarters of the government in the old eighteenth century rectory near the town hall, in which Jared Enderby and Morgan Filson had taken up their headquarters. The rest of the town had been in utter darkness.

The roaming mob had started looting, and the appearance of a light was the prelude to an immediate foray. It had groped its way to the government liquor store on Main Street, and ransacked it. There had been orgies, shootings, fires; but these had been quenched quickly by the water vapor in the air, which had been precipitated in downpours of tropical violence.

During that first night of two hours the mob had been in control. Bands of looters had even attacked the rectory, but had been driven off by the guards. Meanwhile a complete system of control and rationing had been planned. The police and volunteers organized by Hannings had all come over to the new government, under Tom Garry.

"In the first day," said Jared, "we'll get this town policed and organized. The second day we'll bring in provisions from outside. Garry, get

all the trained mechanics you can find. We'll work this thing out. We're not going to be beaten."

"I guess not, chief," answered Tom Garry. "What we need is to keep our heads. S'posing the day is only two hours long—well, so's the night. We've got that comet licked. Only thing is, we got to know it ourselves."

In the station on the south shore, Ridgway had stuck to his half-hourly broadcasting. "The comet is gone," blared the loudspeakers. "There is no longer any danger from it. Our fragment of Earth appears to be functioning as a second moon to the older portion, and is subject to its attraction."

"It is not likely that any considerable portion of the oceans has been torn away with us, but, if there is any large body of water in the vicinity, there is the danger of tidal waves. Earth waves are also possible, pending the readjustment of equilibrium. The old moon is now ten times nearer to us than it was to Earth before the change. We shall adjust ourselves. Avoid panic, and follow the directions of President Hannings and the Committee."

Ridgway had not yet learned of Jared Enderby's coup. Alone in the empty broadcasting station, sleepless, remote, he was devoting himself to the service of humanity.

In Tom Garry, Jared found a shrewd and clever adjutant. The police chief of Mineola had kept his head completely, chiefly because he was not gifted with an over-supply of imagination.

By nightfall order had been completely restored in the town, and the first part of Enderby's program had been completed. All weapons had been confiscated, and pillagers had been shot down remorselessly. A machine

gun, which had been found in the ruined structures of the Army flying field, now stood in front of the rectory, manned by ex-service men.

Plans for the collections and distribution of food had been drawn up. But fugitives, drifting in, had reported that the countryside was swarming with bands of looters, who were murdering and ravaging, and driving off stock to their headquarters somewhere in the scrub country east of Hicksville. At the head of these, according to their reports, was a man of huge stature, wearing a suit of complete armor.

Gradually Nils Eriksen was emerging as leader of the marauding bands, the head of an opposition that would have to be crushed.

Some information had been brought back as to the extent of the disaster. West of Jamaica, which was a ruin, there was nothing but desolation. New York had vanished, and in its place stood a line of smoking mountains. Long Island Sound was dry, and there were no signs of life on the shore of Connecticut. And Ridgway had radioed from his station that the south shore of Long Island now extended indefinitely out into the muddy bed of what had been the Atlantic.

**I**T was half-way through the third night, when due to some shift in the axis of the new Earth, a fresh phenomenon appeared, inspiring the wildest terror.

It was the moon, the old moon, but swollen to a size ten times that of the sun. An enormous ball of dull, unburnished copper, rising out of the western horizon and pursuing its slow course across the sky. A moon so monstrous that it seemed as if it might at any moment fall upon Earth and crush it. A moon now less than

seventy thousand miles away, according to Ridgway's estimate.

"We are now a satellite to the old moon," blared the loudspeakers. "But Long Island is safe. Keep up your courage. There is nothing to fear."

Did Ridgway believe it, or was he keeping up the game until the end? No one was destined to know that. Nobody thought of him as a personality, alone in the abandoned broadcasting station.

That night throngs filled the streets again, but the police patrols were unneeded. Under the fearful circle of that copper orb above, the crowds drifted to and fro, aimless and terror-stricken. They filled the churches and gathered at all the street intersections to listen to the wild words of fanatics, prophesying doom.

The chauffeur, Jenkins, whom Jared had left in charge of the women members of his party when he rode into Hempstead, had found shelter for them in a barn outside the house at nightfall. When the sun rose he had brought them in, together with Walter Ferrand. They had met Jared Enderby's scouts, who had conveyed them to the rectory.

Kay had been ensconced under guard in a large upper room of the building, pending the reestablishment of order, while the female domestics of Jared's household had been placed in other rooms. Kay had only seen her father for a few moments. Downstairs she could hear the constant tramp of men, the sound of shouting and challenges. From her windows, which looked out upon the rectory lawn, she could only see the guards and police, setting up tents and tying the horses to picket lines.

Pompson, the old butler, had come up to see her. He had told her that

her father was at the head of the new government, and that she must be patient until order was reestablished. But it had been almost impossible for Kay to make Pompson understand what she said to him, for he had gone deaf, like many others, on account of the triple atmosphere pressing upon his eardrums.

Shouting, as many deaf people do, the old man had informed Kay. "Your father's getting things under control. It's only a question of time now. These Americans are a very excitable people. Mercurial, I'd call them, if you'll excuse the word, Miss Kay."

"And how soon shall we be able to go back to Sand Point, Pompson?" Kay had cried in the butler's ear.

Pompson had caught that. "We'll all be home next week, Miss Kay, I imagine," he answered. But unfortunately the word "week" no longer had much significance.

Kay sat constantly at the window, with its tiny squares of glass, watching the guards moving upon the lawn. Flirtations had already sprung up between them and the maids in the other rooms upstairs. The old world hadn't changed entirely, after all.

WALTER FERRAND had been established as secretary to the new government. It was during the second period of daylight that he found the opportunity to visit Kay.

When she opened her door at his knock, he entered, closed it behind him, and stood leaning against the wall. His face looked ghastly and Kay watched him with a sense of disillusionment and pity.

"Well, Walter?" she asked as gently as she could.

"God," muttered Walter, "how long is it since we were golfing at the

country club? Will those days ever come again?"

"I think so, Walter," answered the girl. "It's hard to keep one's balance in these times. But we've all got to do our best. Pompson thinks—"

"Damn Pompson!" cried Walter. "Listen, Kay! I can requisition two horses and have them saddled and waiting at the side entrance to the rectory as soon as it gets dark. Ride back to Sand Point with me! This is all a dream, I tell you!" he cried hysterically. "And that fellow, Nils Ericson, is bringing his gang to attack the town. We'll all be murdered. Once we're back home we'll find things the way they used to be."

"I wish it was a dream, Walter," answered Kay sadly. "But it's not. We must stick by my father."

"It must be a dream," Walter whimpered. "Kay, come with me. We'll go back and get married. We'll find things like they were—"

It was evident that Walter Ferrand had gone to pieces. There was an unmistakable change in him. He was wearing fresh linen and a suit that fitted him fairly well—in fact, the property of the old rector, who had been visiting in New Jersey at the time of the cataclysm, and was not likely to return. He looked, externally, his old jaunty self again. But his face had changed, as if a mask that he had always worn had been removed. It was becoming furtive, foxlike.

And Kay had changed, though Walter wasn't able to see that. She had become another woman. Insensibly she, too, had been swept from her moorings. Ever in her mind was the figure of Nils Ericson, as when he had carried her home that night through the darkness.

And, again, as he had been in the

hall of her father's house, a mighty figure, wearing a helmet and breastplate and trailing a dripping sword. She feared him, and yet she felt oddly akin to him. Something adventurous in the very depths of her nature had responded to those words of his, "I'm coming back!"

And Walter—what was he saying? He wanted her to ride back to Sand Point with him and marry him!

She broke into irrepressible, mirthless laughter. "Stand by my father, Walter," she said. "That's our one hope."

THERE were footsteps on the stairs, in the hall, a thumping at the door. Kay stepped past Walter and opened it. Tom Garry stood on the threshold, neat in a new police uniform that he had found in the Hempstead station, his gold shield pinned to his breast.

A little shiver of fear ran through Kay as she met Garry's leering eyes. Garry was changing too, but he was becoming wolf, not fox.

"Well, Miss Kay," he chuckled, "we're going to get that big sweetie of yours."

"I don't know what you mean," Kay replied.

Tom Garry chuckled again. "The chief wants you," he said to Walter, and turned, and looked back at Kay over his shoulder as he stamped from the room.

When the two had gone, Kay turned the key quickly in the lock and leaned against the door, overcome by the fear that she had been fighting back so long. Suddenly she realized her helplessness. There was no one whom she could turn to for protection except her father. And he, too, was changed.

Kay had already discovered that she

could hear the voices in the living room by putting her face close to the big fireplace. As she moved toward the window she heard a dull murmur from beneath. She recognized her father's voice, then Garry's.

"It's going to work, chief," Garry was saying. "That feller we was going to string up for looting swears he can make good. He's got that super-charger fitted to the motor, and, by heck, she runs! Only needs a little more adjustment, and we'll get that damn Swede, Ericson."

"Yeah, we've found where he's hanging out. Not more than a dozen miles away, and he's collected all the crooks and gangsters that have come in from Jamaica and Queens. We'll surround the place to-night and make a clean sweep of them."

"Get him," said Jared. "Follow him up if he escapes, but get him!"

"You bet I'll get him. And alive. He's going to swing from one of the rectory trees, unless that feller can fix up a chair for him, with enough voltage. If he could start one of them dynamos, that would do the trick."

"How many men has Ericson got with him?"

"Not more than a couple hundred. And say, you'll laugh, chief. What d'you think he's armed them with? Bows and arrers and slings. He's some slick boy, that Swede, but we got ammunition enough to wipe out the whole gang."

"It's up to you, Garry," answered Jared wearily.

Tom Garry noted Jared's mottled face and the strained, taut muscles. Was Enderby cracking too?

"Sure, chief, you count on me," he said. "Ain't he been sentenced to the chair? And the State laws ain't been repealed. We'll get him, chief, don't worry."

He stamped out of the room. Jared Enderby leaned his head upon his hands. His eyes drooped; then he pulled himself together. He'd see it through. Once Ericson and his gang had been destroyed . . . the new world for which he had been planning. . . .

Upstairs, Kay cowered beside the chimney. She hadn't heard much, but she had heard Nils's name, and Garry's laugh, and the fear that filled her heart was the greater because it had no substance.

**TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.**



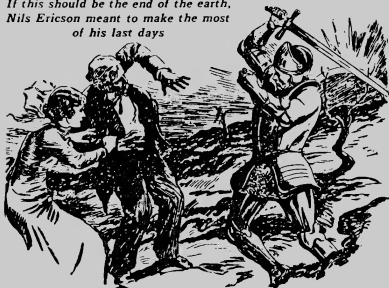


# World's End

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Author of "The Vengeance Trail," "The Branded Man," etc.

*If this should be the end of the earth,  
Nils Ericson meant to make the most  
of his last days*



"You damned traitress!" Nils shouted

## LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

NILS ERICSON, standing before the bar of judgment in the Minicola, Long Island, courthouse on that fateful day in the year 1942, heard the sentence that would send him to the electric chair—for a murder he had not committed. Nils, a huge young Viking of the second generation in America, was a taxicab driver, and had driven two thugs to the Long Island estate of Jared Enderby.

Nils did not know they were thugs, nor did he know they were murdering two estate guards while he waited for them, but a jury had declared him guilty as an accomplice.

As Nils faced the judge, the catastrophe struck—the cataclysm of which scientists had been warning the world for several days. A huge comet had appeared out of the heavens and was swinging close to the earth. Suddenly there was a terrific earthquake and cloudburst, buildings were swept away—the end of the world seemed at hand.

Out of the wreckage of the courthouse emerged Nils, dragging with him the unconscious Kay Enderby, daughter of the financier, who had gone there to plead for Nils's life. Nils, who had always dreamed of power and the possession of a beautiful girl like this, did a

queer thing, for him. He carried the girl, unharmed, back to her father's estate.

Then came the most astounding discovery of all: Charles Ridgway, a scientist broadcasting from a radio tower on Long Island, announced that a third of the earth's content, including that part upon which Long Island was situated, had been torn loose from the main body and was now a satellite of the moon. The sun rose and set every two hours; gravity was hugely lessened.

Pillaging and looting began; strong men set themselves up as feudal lords; weak men perished. Jared Enderby and his friend, Morgan Filson, established a government at Hempstead, with Tom Garry, former police chief, as head of the armed forces, and Walter Ferrand, an admirer of Kay's, as secretary. Nils Ericson, meanwhile, had gone out, armed with a broadsword and clad in armor, to become leader of the roving pillagers.

Kay, a virtual prisoner in her father's place, overhears a plan fostered by Tom Garry to capture and kill Nils.

## CHAPTER XII.

"TO THE WORLD'S END."

AS the sun's rim dipped into the north, Kay saw the guards upon the rectory lawn mount their horses and ride away. The horse-hoofs clattered along the road, and in a few moments everything was dark, save for the dull glow of the enormous moon shining through the fog.

Kay felt intensely weary. She had not slept since the old world had come to an end. Day and night had assumed a fantastic unreality.

She dozed, hearing half-consciously the challenges of the guards, a maid in the next room, screaming in a nightmare, the frenzied prayers of a street preacher.

But suddenly she was wide awake, listening to the loud-speaker in the hall below:

"Ridgway speaking. This station has been surrounded by marauders. They have set it on fire. I shall—"

The voice was suddenly cut off. But other sounds were audible now, shouting in the distance, a confused din, very far away. A horseman came splashing through the pools of water in the street and dismounted at the rectory door. The hall was filled with a press of men. Through the chimney Kay could hear her father's voice, raised to a high pitch of excitement.

Then feet were pounding on the stairs, and Walter Ferrand was hammering at the door.

"Kay! Kay! Get up! Your father wants you!"

Kay, who had not undressed, sat up dizzily, her head still swimming with sleep. She slipped to the floor.

"Kay! Kay! Open the door!"

She turned the lock and Walter reeled into the room. "Kay, this is terrible!" he whimpered. "Nils Ericson and his gang have beaten back the guards. They tried to surprise them, and got amushed. They're coming to sack the town. We'll all be murdered."

"Kay! Kay!" the girl heard her father shouting in the hall.

"Coming, dad," she called. And, pushing past Walter, Kay went calmly down the stairs.

Tom Garry was with her father and Morgan Filson. His face was streaked with blood and his cap was gone. His new uniform was splattered with mud. Behind him, a mob was pressing into the rectory.

"Clear out that crowd!" yelled Garry. He slammed the door. "Miss Kay, you got to help us. All depends on you."

"You see, Kay—" began Jared.

"Lemme talk to her, chief," said

Garry. "Here's how we stand. There's about five hundred gangsters outside the town. We meant to surprise them, but they got the jump on us. Our ammo's nearly gone, and they got bows and arrows—arrows that will carry farther than a pistol bullet. And that guy Ericson's leading them, with armor on from head to foot. Gawd, I ain't a fiction story hero! I'm a policeman. And this here Ericson agrees to halt his forces for a truce, provided he can talk to you."

"To me?" Kay whispered.

"You got to talk to him. He's given us till sunrise. That's half an hour away. If you ain't there by then, it's good night to everybody in this town. You gotta soft-soap the feller, agree to everything he says."

"What does he want of me?"

"It don't make no difference," Garry snarled. "I told him you'd be there at sunrise. You'll ride with Smith and Lathrop, and Mr. Ferrand. I got four horses waiting at the gate. Speak, now! Speak quick!"

"Kay, you can trust Garry," said her father. "He won't let any harm come to you. I wouldn't let you go if—if—" His voice faltered irresolutely.

"You bet I won't," said Garry, leering. "Now, how about it?"

"I'll go," said Kay, shuddering at that look in Garry's eyes. "And I'll talk to Nils Ericson."

"Attagirl!" grinned Garry. "You trust me, and I'll never let you down."

KAY sat her horse as if entranced, with Walter riding at her side, and the two guards, one ahead and one behind her. What was it that Nils wanted of her? And what was she going to say or do?

Before the four had left the central portion of the town behind them the

first stragglers of the defeated force came into sight, a sullen mob, some trailing rifles, some limping along, assisted by companions. Then other groups appeared, paying no heed to their yelling officers; then stragglers by twos and threes.

Now the four were clear of the town and Kay felt the fresh wind from the plains blowing on her face. The guard in front turned his horse and led the way up a dirt road. Suddenly a sharp challenge rang through the darkness and the four pulled in.

The guard returned, accompanied by two men on foot, with white armlets on their ragged sleeves. They inspected Kay closely.

"Yeah, that's her," said one of them, and suddenly Kay recognized him as one of the villagers near Sand Point. He took her horse's bridle in his hand and jerked the beast forward. The party proceeded over the flats, which were dotted with clumps of bushes.

Kay's horse swerved, and the man who was holding its bridle cursed. Kay saw, in the light of the moon, that the animal had turned aside to avoid stepping on a dead man who lay outflung upon the ground. Other bodies lay among the bushes. Moans were audible. Kay realized with horror that she was upon the scene of the battle.

That was when Walter Ferrand's nerve broke. A groan broke from his lips. Suddenly he kicked his horse sharply and galloped madly away, bending low over its neck. But he was not going in the direction of Hempstead. He was riding toward the north shore of the island—back to Sand Point, anywhere where he might find refuge.

One of the guards uttered an oath, but Walter was already out of sight.

in the darkness. He grasped the bridle of Kay's horse more tightly.

"Here's where you get down," he said a few moments later. "Don't try no tricks. He'll be waiting for you, and I'll be watching."

Kay dismounted. "What am I to do?" she asked.

"Step ahead through them bushes. You got to meet him alone."

Kay moved forward, hesitated an instant, then went on resolutely. What did Nils want of her?

But suddenly it was no longer dark. Out of the south a lambent flash of light came sweeping over the plains, and the rim of the risen sun appeared through the fogs—fogs so dense that Kay could see only a little distance about her.

But she could see the dead men sprawled upon the ground, pierced by arrows, or with their skulls broken by the stones that lay everywhere about them. And in front were the forces of Nils Ericson, standing in a long and closely serried line.

As Kay stood revealed to them, shouts came from their throats and they began to surge slowly forward.

Ragged men, carrying long bows in their hands, with quivers upon their shoulders, filled with arrows. Men with slings, and bags of stones at their waists. The long line undulated like a snake, in places invisible through the fog, and again appearing, slowly encircling Kay as she stood there.

There was a movement in its midst. And out of it there issued the great form of Nils.

HE was completely clad in one of the fifteenth century suits of armor from Jared's house. It seemed to reflect, not the risen sun, but the unburnished copper of that

fantastic moon that was dipping into the east.

Nils came slowly forward. He was armed only with the long sword he held. So he had looked to Kay that dawn in her father's hall. Incredible as he seemed, he was somehow more real to the girl than her own father.

Now all sound seemed to have ceased, save for the sudden twittering of a flock of birds that had come swooping down, wheeled, and flew off into the thickening fog.

But another figure was approaching Kay. It was that of an elderly man with white side-whiskers, wearing a black swallowtail coat and what had once been a stiff shirt-front, but was now a mere mass of soggy, mud-stained tissues. It was the butler, Pompsen.

Pompsen pushed past Kay. "I've been with Miss Kay and Mr. Enderby for thirteen years," he said to Nils. "Say what you have to say, and please speak loud. I'm a little hard of hearing."

Nils seemed not to have heard. He stood looking down at Kay. "I told you I'd come back," he said. "I've come—for you. You and me—you and me—since that last time I saw you in the courtroom, I've known it."

His voice rang out: "The world's come to an end now. This is going to be my world. I want you. Are you coming with me, Kay?"

Kay was a tall girl, but her head reached only to Nils's shoulder. Her eyes were fixed on his. Deep down in her something was stirring, some instinct, perhaps the racial memory of some ancestress of centuries before who had left home and hearth in ancient Britain at the bidding of such another man, to follow him overseas.

"Where?" Kay whispered.

Nils made the slightest motion of his head. "Out there," he said "Out there, across the sunlit plains. To the end of the world, to the edge of this new world, and over. Will you come with me, Kay?"

"Yes," Kay heard herself whisper. "Yes, I'll come to the world's end with you."

Nils's arms were about her. And nothing else counted. All else had ceased to exist. All sound had ceased; the heavy sun and the giant moon leered down at that strange wooing through twin funnels in the mists.

And then, suddenly, the spell was broken. Out of the distance there came a clanking, grating sound, and through the bushes there appeared the snout of a caterpillar tractor, an army tank. The muzzles of two machine guns projected through the slits in front of it.

And behind it appeared Tom Garry's forces, creeping forward cautiously from tree to tree.

**T**HIS was the surprise that Garry had promised Jared Enderby.

The tank had been discovered in the ruins of the Army flying field, and it had been equipped with a super-charger, by means of which the combustible mixture was delivered to the cylinders at normal atmospheric density. But Garry, unable to bring the tank upon the scene on the preceding night, had trusted too rashly to his guards, and underestimated Nils's strength.

The huge mechanism rushed forward, sweeping through the scrub and churning up the soggy soil. The machine guns broke into a stuttering crescendo. The tank did not make for Nils, but plunged straight forward toward the lines of his men, who began

to fall beneath that steady stream of lead.

Nils uttered a wild cry and caught Kay by the shoulder. "You damned traitress!" he shouted.

Old Pompsen tried to tear away his grasp upon the girl. Unarmed, he faced him, and the great sword that Nils was raising in his right hand Kay screamed, and tried to thrust herself between them. For a moment it looked as if Nils was going to cut Pompsen down.

Kay saw what followed as in a dreadful vision. Nils's followers, reduced to little groups, were putting up a desperate resistance. Stones and arrows, shot with amazing force under the lessened power of gravitation, went hurtling through the air. For a moment it looked as if Nils's forces might yet retrieve the situation.

But his remnants broke under those leaden blasts, and the tank went churning along the field, shooting into the fog, which alone saved the fugitives from annihilation.

Nils stopped. The door of the tank had opened. Garry leaped out, yelling, and waving his arm toward him. A score of the police chief's followers were coming up at a run.

And then Nils laughed. A roar of mirth convulsed him and he swung his sword in a bright circle round his head while the guards, who were evidently under orders to take him alive, hesitated and drew together.

Suddenly Nils turned and ran back to where Kay was standing. He seized her in his arms, as if she were a child, ran to where the horses were standing, dimly outlined in the fog, and swung her into the saddle of the nearest.

Nils leaped up behind her. Again he laughed, and in a moment the animal was speeding into the mists, while

loud cries of rage followed the fugitives. Kay could hear Garry's voice raised in a high-pitched howl of fury.

But they were gone, speeding over the plains, with the white mist-wreaths round them, and the dull sun above. And Kay, feeling Nils's arm encircling her, turned and looked into his face.

"I didn't trick you," she cried. "And I'm no traitress, as you called me."

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE FLOOD.

ALMOST in a moment Nils and Kay had disappeared from sight in the fog, which was thickening every moment. Garry drove the tank furiously in pursuit, ditched it in a sharp declivity, where it churned up clods of mud in a futile effort to free itself.

Garry leaped out again. "Well, they got away," he said to the gathering guards. "But it won't be for long. No use trying to foller up that crowd now. Back to Hempstead!"

Nils's escape seemed to the guards a minor matter in the face of the victory they had achieved. The terrain was littered with dead and wounded men, victims of the machine guns. Roars of cheering greeted Garry's dictum, and the victorious force began to marshal itself and make its way back to town, Garry and his personal body-guard riding, the rest straggling along the pike, in very different spirits from the defeated troops of an hour or two before.

Garry spurred his horse ahead with about two dozen mounted men about him. He knew what he planned to do, but as yet he had only communicated his intentions to a half-dozen of

those who were closest to him—police-men from the Hempstead station.

They clattered along the streets, straight through the hedge that bordered the rectory lawn, and drew rein. The time for the master stroke was ripe.

"Where's Enderby?" bawled Garry. "Go bring him here! Tell him I want to speak to him!"

The guards yelled and started on the run toward the house. They came back, roaring with exultation, hustling Jared Enderby and Morgan Filson in their midst.

Now it was clear to all. Townsfolk and refugees who had been streaming onto the lawn set up a shout.

"Garry for boss!" they roared. "Put them out, Tom!"

"You betcha!" grinned Garry. "Well, how about it, Enderby?" he asked, as Jared was dragged before him.

Half-drugged from lack of sleep, Jared nevertheless faced Garry without a qualm of fear.

"I might have known, you dog," he said. "I might have known you'd betray me as you did Hannings."

Garry's fist crashed into Jared's face, sending him reeling backward. "Take these guys away," he roared. "Put them in the basement under guard. They're through. I'm boss of the world now—git that, fellers? Boss of the world!"

During the short hour of daylight that remained, Hempstead went mad. Nils Ericson was beaten, his crew a mass of helpless fugitives. Garry had beaten them. A yelling mob surrounded the rectory, cheering him. They'd got a man in command now, in place of Enderby and Filson, under guard in the rectory basement.

Most of the mob and guards were

drunk. Garry, dazed from want of sleep, drank freely, too, in his headquarters, which had been Jared's. He was planning the pursuit of Nils and Kay in the morning. The girl's escape had aroused his desire for her to the point of madness.

Wasn't he boss of the world now? Couldn't he have anything he wanted? In his imagination he saw a policeman's world, himself with a troop of underlings, issuing laws, restoring order out of chaos. A policeman's world, and a man's world; only, with the limitations of his imagination, he saw it as a sort of glorified Mineola, in which he was police chief, judge, and law-giver.

He strutted down to the basement where his two prisoners were confined under the charge of an armed guard. He saw them seated against the wall, by the light of a flickering candle.

"Stand up, you two!" he roared.

Jared got upon his feet, and so did Morgan Filson, but there was no deference in Jared's attitude.

"That girl of yours has beat it with Nils Ericson," snarled Garry.

"Good," said Jared. "I guess she'll be safer than in your hands, Garry."

Tom Garry glared. "I'm the only man among you, Enderby," he shouted. "Nothing don't scare me. I ain't feazed because the moon's swelled up twelve times its nacheral size, and the sun sets in the north. That's me, Tom Garry. I'm boss, and I'm staying boss."

"I'm holding you two huns till I get her back. Then I'll tell you what I'm going to do with you."

He turned and stalked out. His last threat had been characteristic of the policeman's mind. Suspense—uncertainty—those were the weapons that would break a man down. Enderby

might be useful to him after he had caught Kay. He didn't know yet. He was almost too tired to think.

THE fog had dissolved in a torrential downpour. A hurricane sprang up. The trees creaked and groaned and lashed their branches, and from the distance came sounds like the ripping off of roofs. The huge copper moon had sunk in the east.

"I didn't trick you, Nils!"

"I know it, Kay. And it don't matter nohow. I love you anyways."

Nils, in the saddle now, held her closely in his arms. For Kay, all the past had been definitely swept away. Past and future were blended in this present. She leaned back against Nils's shoulder.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked as the horse picked its way slowly through the utter darkness.

"We got a hangout, near your home. Those fellers with me wasn't gangsters. They're the ordinary country folks. We were going into Hempstead when Garry's men attacked us. We want to start the world again, a world of decent folks and homes and peacefulness. And we can do it. They'll come back, what's left of them. I'll get an army again. But there'll be no peace while Garry's at large."

"My father's at the head of things," said Kay.

"Yeah, but he don't understand. This is a new world that's started. Garry stands for all the past, with its violence, and fellers starving in the streets. I'm going to make a new world for decent folks to live in."

Rain began to fall, a gusty wind swept over the plains, rising in a few minutes to hurricane force. Nils reined in and looked for shelter, but nothing was visible through the dark-

ness, except the edge of that huge moon, rising in the west again, after a bare half-hour below the horizon. The force of the wind made progress almost impossible.

"We got to find shelter," said Nils, slipping from his horse and lifting Kay down. For a moment their lips clung together.

Then, of a sudden, the sickle of copper in the west was blotted out by what looked like a dark wall. House-high, it came sweeping onward, a wall of water that broke upon woman and man and horse and swept them away upon its furious, foaming crest.

The tidal bore, piled up by the gravitation of the moon, had struck full on the south shore of Long Island, from Freeport to Massapequa. Sweeping across the flats, it broke upon the higher ground about Hempstead, hardly diminished in violence.

It was the staunchness of the old rectory, and perhaps the obstructing houses on either side of the narrow street on which it stood that enabled it to hold firm. Twenty feet high, the flood roared about the rectory, hurling an avalanche of demolished timbers, bricks, and stones against it, and smashing through doors and windows. Branches, whipped from the trees, went sailing through the air.

As the torrent came pouring through the cellar window, the guard yelled and ran for the stairs. Jared Enderby and Morgan Filson followed him. The three fought their way upward through a raging cataract and gained the ground floor of the rectory.

The terrified maids were screaming from the second story, but the flood was already receding. On the ground floor it was no more than neck high. Jared and Morgan Filson fought their way to the higher ground at the rear

of the house and, half swimming, half wading, made for the heights above.

A wail of fear seemed to come from all directions simultaneously. A single note, broken into component parts, shrill shrieks of women, and the deeper cries of men. The streets were filled with a shrieking, terror-stricken throng.

Jared paused, waist-deep in the receding flood, and grasped his companion. He pointed northward. "Sand Point," he gasped. "If we can get far enough before the sun comes up—"

"And what then?"

"It's home to me. And maybe that cur Ericson has taken Kay there. Garry said his hangout was somewhere in that direction. I'd like to kill him if I can. Anyway, I'd like to die in my own home, Filson."

**O**VERWHELMED with the need of sleep, Tom Garry had gone upstairs to Kay's room, placing his most trusted guard in the corridor, since he had no desire to risk a counter-coup on the part of any of Jared's followers. Only an hour or so of sleep, and he would be awake and alert again.

He had half-dreamed that he would find Kay there, though he knew it was madness. The sight of the empty room, the faint, elusive perfume in it, stung him to madness. But at sunrise he would lead out a troop of picked men and regain her, and make an end of the remnants of Nils's band.

The shock and roar of the deluge and the screaming of the women in the other rooms awakened him. The water was swirling almost to the window. But Garry had sense enough to watch its progress, and, when he saw that it was subsiding, to wait till its force was spent, and the height of the



water only a foot or so above the ground.

Then he ran down, to find the rectory deserted. The cellar was brimming, but whether or not his prisoners had escaped he couldn't know, probably for hours.

He wasn't thinking of them. Kay—he must get her back before anything else. And he waded out of the front door into a desolate world, lit by the newly risen sun.

A frightful scene of destruction met his eyes. The bodies of drowned horses lay here and there, entangled in the heaps of debris piled up by the water. The street itself was hardly recognizable. Roadway and sidewalks had disappeared, and in their place was a deep channel through which swirled a furious torrent of water. Nearly every house had been torn from its foundations, and the timbers were piled up in ruins. And broad sheets of water extended between them in all directions.

Cries came from the ruins, and here and there were groups of people, gathered on the rooftops of the houses that still remained.

Suddenly Garry perceived a party of some twenty guards riding in, picking their way along the edge of the channel. They consisted of a patrol he had sent out in a vain attempt to follow up Nils's defeated forces through the fogs. They had escaped the flood, and were now making their way back to headquarters.

Here and there, too, little clusters of guards were trying to wade back through the water to the rectory.

Garry stood on the height, where had been the now up-rooted hedge, and called to the riders. They rode up to him, formed in double line at his gesture, looking like men stunned.

"There's been a flood," Garry shouted. "Hempstead's been pretty well wiped out. Enderby's dead. I'm boss of this planet now. You git that, fellers?"

"We got to git that Ericson and the girl, Kay Enderby. They'll be making for Ericson's hangout near Sand Point. We're going to foller them and git them. This here is going to be my world."

So Nils had said to Kay. So the fight was to be staged between the old and the new—between the old conception of arbitrary power and the newer one that Nils had voiced, of a free world of free men and women.

"There's enough of us to clean up Ericson and his crowd," said Garry. "There ain't nothing left of them but a pack of skunks skulking in the scrub. And there's women among them. They're ours. Each of you guys, he's going to be a king now, and I'm the boss king. We're the lords of creation.

"We're going to git all the ammunition that's left in the police station. And then we're riding!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE TRAITOR.

NILS gripped Kay fiercely in his arms as the crest of the tidal torrent swept them from the horse and drove them on its foaming breast. He had just time to draw in a great chestful of air before he was submerged, and fighting madly to gain the surface.

It seemed as if his lungs would burst, while steel hands seemed to tear at Kay in the endeavor to wrench her from his grasp. He felt his senses leaving him—and yet he fought with all the berserk instinct of his nature.

This was the fight that called out every latent power in him, and the flood was a human enemy, striving to wrest away the woman he wanted.

Then, suddenly, the force of the torrent slackened. The tidal bore had spent its force. Nils swam now, supporting Kay's head on his shoulder. Presently he felt bottom under him.

He stood upon his feet, he waded through the flood of lapping waters until he reached the edge of the tide. He sank down on a bank and looked eagerly into Kay's face.

Her eyes were closed, she seemed inanimate. He flung a handful of water into her face sharply, he jerked her arms up, then down, in a first-aid movement. And suddenly she gasped, she breathed. Her eyes opened, stared into his, and then she knew him.

"Nils!" she gasped.

"It's all right," said Nils. "We won through. Lie still and rest."

In the west the sickle of the great copper moon was growing into a half-circle. The sun would soon be up again. Day and night, following each other in bewildering alternation—what did these matter now that Kay was alive? This was Nils's world—a man's world.

"Can you go on?"

"I—think so. How far away is it?"

"We must be pretty close to the place now," said Nils.

The sun had risen once more and they could see what had happened. The sea flood, coming from the south, had cloven a path right into the heart of Long Island, still a roaring torrent, with stretches of mud on either side of it where the waves lapped at the crumbling soil. To the left all was chaos, earth and sea inextricably confounded; on the right grass grew, trees stood, and here and there a house ap-

peared. But there was no sign of any living being.

As they approached the hilly country to the north it gradually became evident that the very vegetation was changing. Strange, unknown, flowerless plants, with enormous, bulbous roots were springing up, and, though it was autumn, the grass had become a vivid green. Huge, multicolored fungi had sprung up everywhere, and ferns with enormous fronds were pushing up through the damp soil. Vines twisted through the undergrowth. Flocks of birds flew high overhead, with a velocity that made them nothing but blurred, moving masses.

Nils helped Kay through the tangled undergrowth, until of a sudden they emerged upon a road. A little farther on they came upon the outlying houses of the village.

Every house had been burned to the ground, the whole place was a ruin; there was nothing in sight except an enormous prowling dog that slunk away into the scrub. A dog looking like a fox-terrier, but as big as a Great Dane.

But of a sudden three human figures came into sight where a dirt road turned into the tarred one. Hidden by the high undergrowth, they were barely fifty paces apart when they appeared. They stopped and stared at Nils and Kay. It was Kay who recognized them first.

"Dad!" she cried, rushing forward. And she flung her arms about the neck of the dragged figure that had once been the immaculate Jared.

"Dad, Nils saved me. He's taking me to a place of refuge. How did you get here?"

Jared, speechless with emotion, could only grip Kay tight in his arms.

It was the third figure that answered.

"Begging your pardon, Miss Kay, I took the liberty of following when you rode away with Mr. Ericson, to make sure you were all right. I was compelled to ascend a tall tree when the flood came, and afterwards I was fortunate enough to meet Mr. Enderby and Mr. Filson, so we came on together."

THE church was the only structure standing in the village, and that was a heap of charred beams, and looked as if it might topple over at any moment. Nils led the way to the rear, where was a flight of steps running down to the basement, piled high with debris. He scrambled down and pushed at a heavy door.

At first it resisted all his efforts to open it. He set his shoulder against it; suddenly it yielded.

A man was standing behind it, a heavy crowbar in his hand, his eyes staring and mad with fear. Kay uttered a cry as she recognized Walter Ferrand.

Nils caught the heavy implement and wrested it away. He thrust Walter backward. Behind him appeared a second man, white stubble on his face, the remnants of a golfing suit hanging grotesquely about him.

Kay recognized the Reverend Philip Haynes in the half-darkness of the cellar. But the rector was a very different individual from the jovial, ruddy-faced man who had played golf with Jared at the country club. Obsessed with the idea that he had failed in his religious duties, he had somehow found the shelter, and had remained there ever since, totally unstrung.

Walter, fleeing on horseback from the scene of battle, had been flung from his mount and stunned. He had

been discovered by a small party of Nils's men who were escaping, and had been brought back. Nils's men were now scouring the country in search of him.

No gangsters these, as Nils had said, but countrymen, bewildered by the world catastrophe, who had turned instinctively to Nils as their leader.

In the dark of that night, with the big copper moon shining through an aperture in the cellar wall, they talked things over.

"I'm going to get my men," said Nils. "We'll best Garry yet. Once he's out of the way we'll have peace and order. I'm willing to serve under you, Mr. Enderby."

"You're the man in charge, Ericson," answered Jared. "I tried and failed. They know you and they trust you. I thought I was a little tin god on my own. Now I've learned to take orders. In these times we want a man like you!"

Nils stood up in his armor. "I'm ready to take the job, Mr. Enderby," he said. "After we're through, I guess there won't be no more fighting. Nor no more one man giving orders to another. Only a new world to make over. That's my idea of what's going to be."

Kay went to Nils's side. "Come safely back," she said. "I shall be waiting for you." Her arms went round his neck and she raised her lips to his. So, perhaps, the Viking women sent their men away upon their voyages overseas.

NILS had promised to be back with some of his men by the next noon. Jared, Filson, and Pompsen dozed, worn out by their journey. So did Kay. She dreamed that she was back at Sand Point. Her

mother was with her, dressing to go to Mineola, to attend the trial. They had argued bitterly whether there had been two burglars in the room or three . . .

Only Walter Ferrand remained awake. In his terror, one overpowering instinct had taken possession of him—to get back to the house at Sand Point. Once there, it seemed to him as if the whole scene would vanish like a dream, that the old life would begin again.

It was insanity. His mind had cracked, as the minds of many others had. But in that gloomy cellar phantasmal terrors beset him. Suppose Garry discovered them there. Suppose, on the contrary, he could find Garry, talk reasonably to him, proffer him his brains and services in return for Kay!

He had seen Kay and Nils embracing, and he knew that he had been definitely discarded. Did he love her? No! He would have admitted that. But she stood for the old order that had passed away, pleasant afternoons at the country club, evenings at Jared Enderby's house—something that he made himself imagine could still be restored, if only he could get away.

Softly he rose to his feet and crept toward the cellar entrance. He squeezed through the partly open door and clambered up the débris outside.

The fog was very thick. The sun was sinking into the north, a dim, red ball, barely discernible. The huge moon burned westward of the zenith. In a few minutes it would be dark.

"Kay! Kay!" whimpered Walter; then, squaring his shoulders with weak ferocity, he struck north along the road in the direction of Jared Enderby's house.

And it seemed incredible to him that the house was still standing. He could

see it, in the last few moments before the red glow of the climbing moon replaced the daylight. Square on its low eminence, just as if nothing had changed, and all had been a dream.

Walter Ferrand struggled on in the red moonlight, past the last houses of the village, toward the house that stood silhouetted upon the rise above him.

There came the sudden clatter of horses' hoofs from the side road. Roars of laughter, two women screaming. Before Walter could find a hiding place, the cavalcade was sweeping down upon him.

It consisted of Garry and his troop. They had taken up their quarters in Jared's house, and, after drinking freely of his vintages, had set out on a foray, resulting in the capture of two Polish women whom they had found hiding in the basement of one of the ruined houses.

Before Walter could leap aside, Garry, at the head of the procession, had sighted him. He drove his horse at him, while Walter stood rooted to the ground in terror.

"Here's one of that bunch, fellers!" roared Garry. "Why, it's that Ferrand guy!" He went into shouts of laughter. He leaned toward Walter over his horse's neck.

"I know you, you hellion," he shouted. "So you thought you'd made your getaway, huh? Git a rope, fellers, and brace him to my bridle. Where did you come from, huh?" Sudden suspicion shot from the police chief's eyes.

"I was coming to find you," babbled Walter. "I know where Jared Enderby and Kay are hiding. And I can get you Nils Ericson."

Garry bristled. "What's that? You take us to them, and—"

"If I take you, will you give me

Kay and let me work with you? You'll need a man like me. And you won't harm any of them? I thought we could—we could make a treaty—"

"Treaty? Suits me," roared Garry. "You show me where they are, and the world's yours!"

SO deep was Kay's sleep she heard no sounds without until Pompsion's hand upon her shoulder awakened her.

"Miss Kay, keep quiet," hissed the butler's voice in her ear. "Don't move or utter a sound."

The air outside was filled with drunken shouts and blasphemies, the clatter of hoofs.

"What is it?" muttered Morgan Filson, half awake.

"Keep quiet, Mr. Filson. Mr. Enderby, sir—"

"Where's Walter?" whispered Kay.

"I can't find him," muttered Pompsion. "He—he—"

Pompsion guessed the truth only too well. Old Haynes had awakened in his corner and was muttering a prayer. Kay clung to the butler. "Nils! That isn't Nils!" she whispered.

Men were shouting at the cellar entrance. The door swung open, admitting a gust of wind and a great shaft of red moonlight. And then Kay screamed as, in that red light, she saw Garry and Walter standing in the cellar entrance, and men behind them.

Pompsion snatched up the crowbar and ran at Garry, who dodged the falling iron, pulled his pistol, and snapped the trigger. The roar of the discharge filled the cave. Pompsion dropped inert.

"There they are!" yelled Garry, pointing to the girl, Jared and Filson, and the old minister. "You fellers," he addressed the group behind him,

"wait for that dumb Swede. We'll take this lot along with us."

Kay, incapable of resistance, swooned as he caught her up in his arms and carried her up the steps, while Jared Enderby and Morgan Filson were hustled along by Garry's satellites.

Old Haynes, who seemed unaware of what was taking place, they left contemptuously beside the prostrate form of Pompsion.

## CHAPTER XV.

### GARRY AT BAY.

THE sun was just above the southern horizon when Nils returned, accompanied by some fifteen men whom he had encountered, making their way back to the hangout.

Once—how long ago?—these men had been small storekeepers, garage men, farmers; now they had reverted to something primitive, the common human type, as it exists when the veneer of civilization has been stripped away. Most of them had managed to get their womenfolk into hiding in the scrub country eastward, but some were burning with the desire for vengeance for those whom they had lost at the hands of the gangsters whom they identified in their minds with Garry's men.

Ragged men, armed with bows and slings which Nils had taught them how to make. Stones that would fly almost with the velocity of a bullet, with the decreased force of gravitation, and arrows, feathered with the plumage of barnyard fowls, that would pierce a man or a horse at a hundred yards.

Nils ran down to the shelter. Old Pompsion tottered toward him, bleed-

ing from a bullet wound that had laid one temple open.

"Garry's got them," he moaned. "Miss Kay and the master and Mr. Fil-on. He's taken them away—a half-hour ago, I think. I don't know. He—shot me!"

Nils was outside the structure with two bounds. "They've taken them away!" he shouted. "If we can't see them from the rise, they'll be in Enderby's house. It's a fight to the finish—and we've got to save them, if it ain't too late. If it is—"

They raced along the road to the rise from which, in the morning sunlight, the flats were visible beneath them. There were no signs of any movement. But the trail of horses in the muddy road ran straight to and from Jared Enderby's house.

Inside it, one could have seen the work of the looters at a glance, and it was typical of its kind in its senseless vandalism.

The large rug had been fouled with mud and tossed aside, a suit of armor had been toppled over and hacked with axes, chairs and tables had been smashed out of sheer lust of destruction. Hangings and curtains had been pulled from their supports and torn into strips.

The crystal electrolier that hung inside the entrance had been made a target for bullet practice, and globes and crystal pieces lay in a wide range about the muddled hardwood floor.

**G**ARRY pulled Kay from her saddle, lifted her in his arms and carried her within. He placed her on the ripped couch that stood on one side of the hall. He tried to force some liquor from a flask down her throat.

He looked at her gloatingly. He

had her in his power at last, and everything that stood between him and unlimited power had been swept away.

He heard her mutter Nils's name, and a curious impulse toward self-revelation mastered him.

Garry had been a policeman all his life. Not a bad man hitherto, as his kind went. He had risen to his position by unflinching courage and devotion to duty. His code was loyalty to his organization, a sort of tribal virtue. Beyond that—nothing. And now that the old world had been swept away, because he had not imagination enough to adapt himself to the new, he was still the policeman, but no longer restricted by law.

Visions of limitless power, of a glorified police rulership of the world, beset him. And yet something in him demanded that he justify himself to Kay.

"You listen to me," he said. "I ain't a fool nor a coward. I'm a man in a man's world, same as it's always going to be. Us here are the bosses, and I'm the kingpin boss. I'm going to round up them skulkers in the scrub, same as the Injuns was rounded up. They're going to work for me. And I'm going to build me a palace in Hempstead and build up law and order. I'm going to make this world over. You and me, Kay, because I want you.

"Yeah, that day you come into the office at Mineola, you looked at me like I was the dirt under your feet. Them days is gone. You're mine, because I'm taking you, and lemme tell you, if it wasn't me, it would be some of my crowd. You're lucky. As for your sweetie, Nils Ericson, I'm going to put him on the spot. Maybe you'll cry a little, but it ain't no sense crying for a dead man."

Kay was huddled up on the couch, her eyes half-closed. She muttered Nils's name again, as if she hadn't heard what Garry was saying. Garry was puzzled.

"I'm going to take you up to one of the rooms where you can rest," he said. "Nobody won't disturb you there. You think it over. Keep them squawkers quiet!" he shouted to the guards, who, befuddled with Jared's liquor, were baiting their two women captives. "Git out of here!"

The words died on his lips as shouts came from the men on guard before the house. Garry leaped to his feet and ran to the entrance. The sun was already high in the sky; eastward, the huge moon was descending. Over the lawn some twelve or fifteen men were running, bows across their shoulders or slings in their hands, and at their head, his blond hair blowing back in the breeze, was Nils.

"Ericson! We got them! Wipe them out, fellers!" shouted Garry.

The guards came reeling out. There was a scattering of shots, and one of Nils's men dropped. Then stones and arrows began to fly, hurling into the packed mass of Garry's men.

Some half-dozen of them dropped, killed on the spot or maimed by the deadly missiles. Garry frothed incoherent curses as he swung the heavy pistol in his hand and fired. But no more of Nils's men fell.

He looked about him and found himself alone. His guards had fled.

**G**ARRY'S cool head was his chief asset. He ran back into the house and snatched Kay up in his arms. He carried her to the rear, where the guards were scrambling frantically into their saddles.

Cursing, he thrust his way into their midst, swung Kay up on one of the horses and leaped up behind her just as Nils's men came streaming past the house.

In a moment he had the reins in his hand and was riding in the wake of his defeated band. He turned and yelled defiance.

In another minute he was well beyond pursuit, and galloping along the dirt road in the direction of Hempstead. Ahead of him, unhampered by the double burden that his horse carried, the guards were in full flight. But Garry's fears fell from him as he saw Nils and his men in impotent pursuit.

Once back at Hempstead, Garry would rally the remainder of his forces, get the machine gun from the rectory, perhaps retrieve the foundered tank. This defeat had been a mere incident. And he still had Kay.

He struck her brutally across the face as she tried to leap from the horse.

"I got you," he bellowed. "And I'll get that big feller of yours yet. Hell, what's this!"

The plains before him were black with people. They consisted of the inhabitants of Hempstead, who had fled in panic after the recession of the flood. One thought inspired them all—to get away, somewhere into the depths of the countryside, where food might be had, security from the perils that had beset them.

Garry rode, now a full quarter-mile behind the fleeing remnants of his gang, scowling as he saw the mass of fugitives drifting aimlessly across the plains.

Then, of a sudden, a distant, roaring sound came to his ears, increasing in volume, until it sounded as if an express train was rushing in on him at full speed. The fogs were thin, and,

looking southward, to his horror Garry saw the whole landscape seeming to quiver and raise itself like a mountain wall.

Then it subsided under a mighty crest of water that came pouring northward.

It was, in fact, the tide raised by the giant moon, and now become periodical. Forty feet high, the tidal bore, coming from miles away in the Atlantic deeps, was sweeping up the channel that it had already carved for itself.

From Freeport to Hempstead, and onward toward the hills of the north shore it roared in a mighty deluge.

That deluge had spent the greater part of its force by the time it reached the neighborhood of Sand Point. The crest of the wave had rushed, foaming and churning, into the channel that it had carved out, to spend its force against the foot of the hills, where it was already breaking in a hundred rills of foam.

But a long arm reached out between Garry and his men, who had crossed it only a few moments before the advent of the deluge. A torrent seventy or eighty feet in width, roaring along a gully that it had deepened on the day before; a stream swift as a mill-race and utterly impassable by man or horse.

On the farther side of this the remnants of Garry's guards were already mingling with the fugitives from Hempstead. And all were lining up along the farther bank of the torrent, watching.

It was odd that no one shouted. No voice was raised. Silently the throng gathered to witness the spectacle of the solitary rider, with the helpless girl in front of him.

And behind, coming on on foot,

Nils's men, and Nils leading them in his armor.

For the first time in his life Garry had the sense of being absolutely alone. On the other side of the torrent lay empire, power, dominion; on the near side—death!

CURSES broke from his mouth. He looked to right and left of him. No chance of escape, unless he rode into the hills and sought to round that arm of foaming water, and so reach the farther side. It could be done, burdened though Garry's horse was with the two riders. But if he did that, if he sought safety in such flight, Garry knew that he would be discredited among his followers.

For Nils was coming on alone, ahead of his followers, as if he meant to challenge him to single combat. And Garry was no coward.

The sight of this man, who had escaped him at Mineola, roused all his fighting rage. He felt that he was in an arena, formed by the hollow of the valley, with the spectators crowded on one side; that all depended on his killing Nils and ending the struggle at a blow. Besides, with Nils gone, his followers would lose heart.

So, at least, Garry reasoned.

Nils had signaled to his men to fall back. Yes, he was coming on alone, his only weapon the sword he carried. Garry grinned. With a curse he dropped Kay from his saddle and rode forward to meet his enemy.

"Come on, you dawg!" he bawled. "If you're a man and not jest a yaller dawg, come on and fight me. I'll meet you man to man!"

Nils was coming on, slowly, inevitably, the mighty berserk spirit gathering itself beneath the mantle of impassivity it was wont to wear. Garry



measured the distance between them. Fifty paces—forty—thirty—twenty—five.

Suddenly he drew his pistol, aimed, and fired. The shot went true. He saw the starred crack on the old armor; he saw Nils reel under the shock. Then a trickle of blood from Nils's breast.

Then Nils was coming on again.

Garry fired and missed, fired and missed, spurred his horse madly, trying to ride Nils down.

He fired his last shot, and the helmet swung sidewise on Nils's head. Then, just as the horse's hoofs upreared to ride Nils down, the sword swung round Nils's head in a great, flashing circle.

A cry came from Nils's lips—a single cry. The flash of the sword formed only a half-circle now. The weapon dropped at Nils's side. But Garry was down, and the riderless horse was galloping madly across the valley.

Garry was down, the trunk of what had been a man, sprawled flat against the reddening sword. And suddenly a yell broke simultaneously from the throats of the watching scores. Perhaps they had seen a symbol in that armored form that now leaned heavily upon the sword—yet not of war, but of the new world that was to be.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE NEW WORLD.

THE village was fully a mile away from Jared Enderby's house at Sand Point, yet the sound of saws and hammers came quite distinctly through the triple atmosphere.

That was one of the strange things to which mankind was growing accustomed. That, and the two-hour day-

and-night periods, and the enormous moon overhead. The daily sweep of the tidal bore, which had divided Long Island in two.

The strange new vegetation, palm-like trees growing with incredible speed. The fogs, and the increased fertility of the ground, and the perpetual summer, so that already the wheat, sown three weeks (old time) earlier, was beginning to show the ear.

Hempstead and all the towns west of the tidal flood had been evacuated, but there was room for all in the fertile reaches of eastern Long Island, and homes were going up daily, trees were being felled, the ground sown.

Poverty had been banished, money was as yet unknown; all the machine implements of the old order had been destroyed, but the accumulated knowledge of centuries survived. It was the youth of a new world, of a world still to be explored, a world set free, and governed only loosely by an elected Council.

Jared Enderby and the Reverend Philip Haynes were passing one of the rusted trains stalled on the tracks, now overgrown with palm scrub.

"And to think I ever wanted to take one of those things and go into New York every day!" he said. He clapped the rector on the back. "Man, I'm alive!" he said. "But I'll tell you what's the queerest thing of all. That last drive of mine was exactly eight hundred yards. I stepped it off. We'll have to double the length of the links, or set somebody to work to make a heavier golf ball."

OLD Pompson, dozing on the terrace, was aroused by Walter Ferrand and the chauffeur, Jenkins.

Walter was a chastened man. The

old jauntiness had disappeared forever. And he was happy. For he had found himself, and, if the discovery had not been a pleasing one, at least he was under no self-illusions any more.

Walter had been working with one of the crews that were constructing the new houses at the foot of the hill.

"Well, Pompson, ready to be best man at the ceremony?" bawled Jenkins in the butler's ear.

"What's that?" yelled Pompson.

"There's a wedding scheduled for nightfall. You ain't forgotten it, have you?"

Pompson got up. "I have not forgotten it, Mr. Jenkins," he replied severely, adjusting the bandage about his forehead. "The question is whether the ironing maid has dried my shirt properly. Linen seems to dry very slowly, what with these fogs and rains."

He made his way into the house and up the stairs. The sun was low in the north when Kay came into the house with Nils. She looked as radiant as every bride is expected to be.

Nils had recovered quickly from the chest wound caused by Garry's bullet,

but he was still pale and walked a little feebly. Jared and the Reverend Philip came up the steps.

"All set for the wedding, Kay?" her father asked. "Sure you're not going to regret it?"

Kay only smiled and clung to Nils's arm. And, a minute later, an apparition came down the stairs, with slow and sedate steps.

It was Pompson, resplendent in his evening clothes, with a shirt-front starched stiff, and immaculate. His white whiskers had been combed until they shone.

As the rector took his stand at the table in the hall, men and women from the village began slipping through the open doorway. Nils, Kay, and Jared took up their stations.

"Friends," said the Reverend Philip. "it is written that heaven and earth shall pass away. Whether that prophecy has been fulfilled as yet, it is not for me to say. But this is one of the things that shall never pass away."

Far off, invisible against the glow of the setting sun, the faint wraith of the comet was speeding on its way into outer space.

THE END.

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*F. Stanley Renshaw.*

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